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In this issue

EDITORIAL

Underestimated Potential

By Hanna Vasilevich

Belarus can hardly be described as a country which attracts much attention from international scholars and analysts. Despite this fact all Belarus-related studies and analyses may roughly be described as those produced within a so-called "*triadic nexus*" that consists of Belarusian authors, foreign authors who focus on Belarus, and the authors who come from Belarusians living abroad, either from indigenous minorities in the neighboring countries or from Belarusian diasporas of migrant origin.

The "*triadic nexus*" framework is used by a well known American scholar Rogers Brubaker who focuses on analyzing the relations among the kin-state, a minority and a nationalizing state (the one that accommodates the minority). It aims to show the role and influence that a kin-state can impose on the minority-majority relationship. One can apply the same idea of "*triadic nexus*" framework to the current situation in Belarusian studies, . However, it would be similar to the scheme produced by Brubaker only in its name and its modality in order to consider and measure the importance of each participating actor as well as to reveal the challenges and opportunities that Belarusian studies and analyses see worldwide.

As mentioned above, there are three elements of the triadic nexus – Belarusian authors and researchers, foreign authors focusing on Belarus, and foreign Belarusians from diasporas/minorities. The biggest problem in fact exists between the first two elements since they have quite different visions of the situation in Belarus even though they use the same facts and sources. These two often opposing visions may be found not only in political or economic areas, but also in regard to language, culture and history.

A thorough debate on this situation would take at least a couple of long articles, so we will provide a rough and quite simplified overview of the situation. One of the major problems rests upon the fact that foreign authors and researchers see Belarus as a young country that lacks its own history and distinct identity and has no experience of any historical statehood. Hence, Belarus is largely seen as an artificial by-product of the collapse of the USSR whilst its independence is largely seen as occasional and vaguely grounded. As a result,, processes taking place in Belarus are viewed through the starting points described in the previous two sentences. The foreign-produced analyses therefore portray Belarus as another young country that has no other milestones than its Soviet heritage. Lukashenka's election and the country's advanced integration with Russia are also explained through this perception. Moreover, the apparent assent of the Belarus-Russia integration by the Belarusian population is explained through the prism of a lack of a distinct Belarusian identity and allegedly large cultural and linguistic similarities between the two countries. This problem goes along with the relative reluctance toward the Belarusian language based on quite a pragmatic economic approach. This reluctance has two varieties, an active and a passive one. Active reluctance may be described as the use of the Russian language for the media, analysis or policy products aimed at the Belarusian society (Deutsche Welle program, Friedrich Ebert Foundation website, etc.). Passive reluctance is exemplified by the proficiency of certain scholars in only Russian and by the use of the Russian-language transliteration for Belarusian personal and geographic names.

Belarusian authors and researchers largely refer to the rich historical heritage of the Belarusian nation and emphasize the role of language and culture in the identity and distinctiveness of the country. The European Union (mostly equated with the term Europe) and its values are seen as the ultimate solution for the most of the Belarusian problems (both political and economic). For these scholars there is no need to additionally prove Europeanness since the European nature of Belarus and its society is taken for granted. It is often emphasized that Belarus was once the most democratic and tolerant European country (the Grand Duchy of Lithuania which is seen as the Golden Age of the Belarusian historical statehood). The current ruling practices of Lukashenka are portrayed as those that denounce and neglect all that is Belarusian and European. A small push caused by the regime change is often seen as the ultimate solution and a starting point for the European integration.

In fact, the problem of the Belarusian authors and researchers is that they know only a little about foreign studies on Belarus. However, foreign authors and researchers know even less about Belarus. Without an in-depth analysis of the reasons for this situation, one can explain such a poor knowledge of the Belarusian realities through the foreign perception of the studies produced in Belarus. They are often seen as either ideologized, or nationalistic, or methodologically weak.

As a result, the two parallel worlds do not co-exist. They neither interact with each other nor have a basis for a durable cooperation. Such connections may be created by the Belarusian diasporas/minorities. This element both has insider perception of the Belarusian situation and applies western approaches. It has much to offer both Belarusian and foreign scholars. However, its abilities are hardly used.

The recent international recognition of Belarusian *Lacinka* may be seen as a starting point for establishing co-operation. It gives Belarusian language an opportunity to promote both its visual distinctiveness from the Russian and Ukrainian languages, as well as to conveniently establish itself as a part of the linguistic continuum of the Slavic and Baltic languages of the CEE. Initiatives proposed by Belarusian experts and supported by the Belarusian state and international experts may be promoted for a wider scholarly and analytical audience in the West. And it is the Belarusian diasporas that may play the key role in this process.

Concept of the issue

Lack of cooperation between Belarusian and western scholars and authors is largely caused by the current political situation in the country. As a result, there are two parallel worlds where Belarusian and foreign authors and researchers coexist without any considerable interaction with each other. Foreign Belarusians from diasporas/minorities may perform the role of a bridge to bring these two worlds closer to each other. Some recent developments in the international recognition of the Belarusian Lacinka may be used as an opportunity where the Belarusian diasporas may take the leading role. This issue is being discussed in the editorial "Underestimated Potential" by Hanna Vasilevich

This issue is devoted to the perception of Belarus by foreigners to see existing stereotypes if any and to possible opportunities to overcome them, as well as to the perception of others by Belarusians.

The feature article of this issue is "Belarus: Beginnings of Renaissance" by Amb. David H. Swartz, the first US ambassador to Belarus. Amb. Swartz provides his insights on the situation in Belarus while US ambassador.

In his exclusive interview with *Belarusian Review*, Professor Adam Maldzis, an internationally known Belarusist, evaluates the various periods of national politics in Belarus of the XXth century and describes Belarusians' differences from their neighbors and how the newly reestablished Belarusian state was perceived in the world.

Anatol Taras presents the Belarusian Institute of History and Culture, a new institution of Belarusian studies that was officially registered in Riga, Latvia at the end of March 2012.

This issue of *Belarusian Review* also covers the topic of the International recognition of Belarusian Lacinka. The system of Roman alphabet transliteration of Belarusian geographical names proposed by the State Committee on Property of the Republic of Belarus has been approved by the Tenth Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names that took place at the UN Headquarters in New York between July 31st and August 10th, 2012.

A considerable section of the issue is devoted to the political events in and around Belarus.

In his text "Lukashenka needs a soldier not a diplomat" Pavel Usov from the Belarusian Center for European Studies provides an analysis for Aliaksandr Lukashenka's decision to appoint Uladzimir Makei Minister of Foreign Affairs and its impact on Minsk's general foreign policy strategy in the international arena.

In his interview with Belarusian Review, Uladzimir Baradač, chairman of the organizational committee of the "Council of National Rebirth", describes his view of the current situation in Belarus and the further development of events in the country. He argues that in Belarus there exists enormous potential for protest.

In his article "The story of an unnecessary conflict" Kirył Kaścian discusses the situation of the Polish minority in Belarus based on the resolution adopted by the 4th Congress of the Polish Diaspora held in Pułtusk on August 24-26, 2012 where "strong protest against the violation of human rights and discrimination of the Union of Poles in Belarus" was expressed.

In his text "Unexpected Allies" David Erkomaishvili analyzes bilateral relations between Belarus and Georgia within a wider regional perspective.

Another text by David Erkomaishvili "On Indetermination of Geopolitical Choice" represents his reaction to Kirył Kaścian's editorial in *Belarusian Review*, Vol. 24, No. 2 entitled "Simple Mathematics".

A Note of Appreciation

We wish to thank all our subscribers, and particularly those who have sent us larger contributions, or have paid for gift subscriptions.

So far, this year this list includes the following donors:

Alice Kipel, George and Loraine Kipel, Nicholas Sniezko, Alla Orsa Romano, Eugene Kazan, Anatol Sankovitch, Natalla Rusak

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Belarusian Review thanks the following initial donors, and appeals to other loyal supporters to join them:

Lamont and Olga Wilson
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Quotes of Quarter

"The United States stands with Sweden and our European partners in supporting the aspirations of the people of Belarus for a modern, democratic and prosperous future. We again call on Belarus to immediately release and rehabilitate all political prisoners, and to put an end to the repression of civil society and the democratic opposition»,

- said on August 9 **PATRICK VENTRELL**, the acting deputy spokesperson of the U.S. State Department.

FEATURES

STATEMENT
By the Rada of the Belarusian Democratic Republic in Exile

4th August 2012

With Regard to the Denial of an Extension of Diplomatic Accreditation for Ambassador Stefan Eriksson:

The Rada of the Belarusian Democratic Republic in Exile regards the unfriendly international actions by the state authorities of Alexander Lukashenka against the countries of the European Union and the United States as contravening the principles of international relations, the basic interests of Belarus and its people, as well as lacking in international political adequacy overall. This is noted with special reference to the refusal of an extension of the diplomatic accreditation for the ambassador of the Kingdom of Sweden to the Republic of Belarus, Stefan Eriksson.

The BNR Rada asserts that by setting Belarus in opposition to the international community of highly-developed democratic states, Lukashenka leadership's foreign policy is positioned to destroy Belarusian society's ties with democracies in the broader world. That foreign policy has been transformed into an instrument for purposes contrary to the interests of the Belarusian people. Within that policy, Belarus has become a hostage for retaining Alexander Lukashenka's personal power and the interests of his close circle, in contradiction to – and to the detriment of – the interests of the society and the state of Belarus. That foreign policy has been now serving as foreign relations support for political repressions in Belarus.

The BNR Rada points out that, having installed an autocratic regime and deprived the Belarusian people of free and fair elections, the state leadership of Alexander Lukashenka had lost democratic legitimacy. Furthermore, the objectives pursued by the said authority's foreign policy demonstrate that neither in international relations can the regime be regarded as a duly authorised representative of Belarus and possessing full international legal capacity in that respect.

The BNR Rada notes the special personal merits of Ambassador Stefan Eriksson in developing long-term Swedish-Belarusian relations, as well as his interest and care for Belarusian culture, language and our country's future at this difficult point in its history.

Ambassador Eriksson's work has been widely recognised among the civil society of Belarus. The BNR Rada calls on the Government of the Kingdom of Sweden and the European Union to strengthen and sharpen their policy of separating their relations with the society of Belarus on the one hand – from their relations with the authority ruling over Belarus on the other hand. The society of Belarus needs help to strengthen its ability to withstand the repressions.

Instead of Belarus' isolation from the democratic world by the ruling regime, what needs to be achieved is the isolation of that authority from the people and country in Belarus.

The BNR Rada points to the particular severity of damage caused to Belarus's relations with the democratic world over the 18 years under Alexander Lukashenka's autocratic rule.

Belarus will need special assistance from the states and institutions of the European Union for the country's comprehensive rehabilitation from the current regime's damaging actions in the political, legal, economic and other fields. That will need to be implemented in order to create a new possibility for the return of Belarus to the community of democratic states of Europe.

(original signed by)

Ivonka J. Survilla

Belarus: Beginnings of Renaissance

By David H. Swartz

Prior to being nominated by President George W. Bush in early 1992 as the first U.S. ambassador to the Republic of Belarus, I had several times been in what by then was the former Soviet Union. The first was as a graduate student in 1964, the second as a relatively junior diplomat at the American Embassy in Moscow from 1972 to 1975. In the late 1970s, I was assigned to Kiev to head a group opening a U.S. consulate general (cut short by White House decision when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in late 1979). My first exposure to the so-called Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic occurred in June, 1972, when my family and I drove to Moscow from our previous assignment in Germany. We passed through the breadth of Belarus from Brest in the west to Orsha in the east. At that time the Brest-Minsk-Orsha-Moscow highway was one of the few roads from western Europe open to travel by foreigners.

As it happened, our young son became ill with the mumps just about the time we crossed over the Bug River from Poland into Belarus; as a consequence we spent a couple of days more in Minsk than our Soviet Foreign Ministry-approved travel plan called for. (All diplomatic travel in the U.S.S.R. had to be approved in advance by MFA.) No doubt the local KGB office was put on alert that this was a trick of some kind, as American diplomats were always assumed by the Soviets to be spies. In fact, we stayed close to our hotel although I did take the opportunity of walking extensively around downtown Minsk. If there was surveillance, I didn't notice it.

My impressions of 1972 Minsk tracked closely with what I had experienced with the student group in 1964, which had visited Moscow, Leningrad, Sochi, and Tashkent: a rigidly controlled environment of seemingly humorless people long used to being told what to do and, especially, what not to do. For them, unquestioning obedience seemed better or at least safer than making waves. As I got to know the Soviet Union better I came to realize a key difference between communism and democracy:

Under communism if something was not expressly permitted, it was prohibited; in a democracy if something is not expressly prohibited, it is permitted.

In 1972, Minsk stores appeared just as bereft of goods as did those of 1964 Sochi, and what there was seemed to be of comparably miserable quality. Ubiquitous red banners promised the citizenry much and demanded more (always in Russian). In my Moscow tour of duty I quickly learned of one permissible outlet for the typical Soviet citizen to vent frustration with everyday life: the "complaint book" (kniga zhalob' i predlozheniiy). Surly sales clerks (they all were) could be reduced to tears and groveling just by asking for the complaint book—they were prominently posted in every store—and threatening to make an entry.

After our forced departure from Kiev at the beginning of 1980 I occasionally travelled to the U.S.S.R. on State Department business but continued in related assignments including staff director of the U.S.-U.S.S.R. Nuclear Risk Reduction Center and deputy ambassador at the U.S. Embassy in Warsaw, Poland.

The collapse of the Soviet Union, welcome as it was, created major uncertainties and potential dangers for the United States where previously a rather stable, if terrifying, relationship based on the realities of mutual assured destruction (MAD) had reigned for decades. U.S. policy, therefore, above all was targeted at minimizing the possible consequences of a most unstable situation while at the same time promoting the permanent independence and well-being of all the new countries.

Within that overall policy context, our goal was that each new country be treated individually based on its particular circumstances, including historical, cultural, and linguistic factors. Belarus, along with several other former Soviet "republics," had previously been independent. It had its own distinct language, culture, and heritage. But it was also perhaps the most russified of all the emerging states, due in large measure to its geographic position between Russia and western Europe, with the attendant permanent stationing of disproportionately large contingents of the Soviet armed forces on its territory. Russian, of course, was the sole language of the Soviet military as it was with other all-union institutions such as the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Over the years many military personnel married and retired in Belarus. Upon our arrival in Minsk, therefore, it was perhaps not surprising that Russian was the sole language heard spoken on the streets. We also quickly learned that average Belarusians' understanding of their nationhood was quite tenuous and, in the case of the sizable proportion of Russians in the population, non-existent.

Our long-term goals in Belarus included promoting restoration of its repressed historical identity and assisting it to become an equal and responsible partner both of the United States and within international institutions, in particular the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The short-term priorities were to encourage Belarus to rid itself of nuclear weapons remaining on its territory following the demise of the U.S.S.R., to join the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty as a non-nuclear state, and to adhere to the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty. Both goals were achieved, although as is well known recidivism emerged beginning with the presidential election of 1994 and accelerated later. The overarching intent of the U.S. was to learn more about and interact directly with a populace largely unknown to us and to assure them—we meant this very sincerely—that the United States cared about them and would help them emerge from the dark abyss of Soviet communism.

In early January, 1992, the United States became the first country to accord diplomatic recognition to the Republic of Belarus. At the time I was working in State's Office of Inspector General. I was in the midst of an inspection of our embassy at Muscat, Oman, when I received a phone call from the State Department informing me of my selection as U.S. ambassador to Belarus and instructing me to return to Washington immediately to prepare for this assignment.

I spent a couple of weeks receiving intensive briefings, but unfortunately there was no time for Belarusian language training. Indeed, at that point there were no Belarusian instructors on the staff of the State Department's language school. I was, however, familiar with *Belarusian Review*. I called BR's editor, Joe Arciuch, in California and had long conversations with him on all kinds of policy, social, cultural, linguistic, and other matters. Joe thus became the first Belarusian I came to know well, even though it would be some years before I met him in person. Joe represents the very best of Belarus; he is knowledgeable, insightful, thoughtful, kind. At 90, Joe Arciuch continues to follow current events in his homeland and we continue our close friendship.

I left Washington at the end of the first week of March, 1992, and flew to West Berlin. It had been arranged that I would receive a car "on loan" from the U.S. Mission there and drive it to Minsk. At that time, the U.S. team in Minsk had no vehicle and hired taxis to get around the city and beyond. The drive across Poland was uneventful, and I entered Belarus at the Brest border crossing.

It was here that the stereotypes and conclusions I had drawn from my prior service in the Soviet Union, some described above, flew out the window. Having crossed the same border by car in 1972, I was anticipating heavily armed, neatly uniformed, highly suspicious, and very precise Soviet-style border guards. What I found was chaos. Mostly there were various people milling around in jeans and dark leather jackets: some seemed to be travelers like me; others were possibly border officials; still others were apparently civilian local people selling black market gasoline coupons, food, and clothing. Inside the customs house there were many more people congregating around what had once apparently been a Soviet Intourist office. Those who were locals were speaking only Russian.

I sized up the situation as one I didn't want to get involved with, and I luckily found someone who apparently had the authority to wave me through and on my way. I did take the precaution, however, of buying some gasoline coupons from one of the leather-jacket types (for dollars), since from my prior Soviet experience I was sure the few gas stations along the road would only take coupons from foreigners purchased legally in advance. The rest of the trip was uneventful and I arrived in Minsk late on a beautiful late winter Sunday afternoon.

The border scene was perhaps the most vivid one in what was going on throughout the suddenly again-independent Belarus. People seemed, not surprisingly, confused by the convulsions they had just witnessed—indeed experienced—with the sudden demise of the only country nearly all of them had ever known: the U.S.S.R. If it is possible to generalize, I would say that the law-abiding majority tried to understand and react in a civil and peaceful manner to the trauma everyone was experiencing. But I certainly did not sense the degree of euphoria and release among people I met on the street at finally escaping from the Soviet communist yoke that were being reported elsewhere, for example neighboring Lithuania. Belarus' Soviet experience had just gone on too long. Rather, the mood seemed to be one of foreboding, wondering what the future would bring both for Belarus as a whole and for them individually.

The Belarusian government began issuing the country's own currency which for a time existed at par with the Russian (Soviet) ruble. Both for the moment could be used as media of exchange, although I had the sense that barter was also in use as a means for acquiring needed commodities, especially food. At the same time, speculation was rampant; everyone wanted and anticipated the need for hard currency, especially dollars, in the environment of uncertainty. Informal dollar/ruble exchange rates sprang up from street to street, market to market. The authorities simply could not maintain the previous high Soviet-era artificially set ruble value. As spring came and then summer, artisans or anyone else with saleable goods crowded into marketplaces, especially the one in and around the football stadium in downtown Minsk, looking to make deals with foreigners and anyone else with hard currency.

The darker side of any society also made itself quickly known. As elsewhere in the former Soviet Union, a mafia-class seemed to spring up spontaneously. These people had money, fast cars, booze—and weapons. They must have had close ties to the former privileged class—i.e. the communist nomenclatura—and no doubt augmented those benefits with the tools of criminal classes everywhere: extortion, bribery, threats, etc.

Also, there was anger. This seemed noteworthy especially among the newly minted Belarusian armed forces, all of whom were, of course, ex-Soviet military. I remember vividly visiting one army base outside Minsk in 1992 with an American delegation where we encountered a colonel who seemed to epitomize this anger. He had more than twenty years of service, including combat duty in Afghanistan, and now was forced to live with his wife and children in a multi-story barracks with communal kitchen and bathroom facilities at the end of each floor. Military housing, especially for officers, was to become a big political issue.

We came to see this anger a bit more up close with our negotiations over an embassy property. Since the U.S. had been the first country to recognize Belarus as an independent nation, we were accorded right of first choice for embassy premises. We were shown two buildings, the far superior one being the residence of the commanding officer of the Soviet armed forces in the Byelorussian Military District. As we were inspecting it accompanied by a Foreign Ministry functionary (who, by the way, also began writing Belarusian-language novels to promote the language among the populace), I noticed at the rear edge of the property a military officer watching us. I was told he was the commanding general and this had been his residence. The general refused to come speak with us. In the end we did lease the building; everything was removed from the interior prior to our taking possession except for an ornate billiard table and accouterments. We were asked if we wanted them and I immediately said yes. I often wondered how many momentous military discussions may have been discussed around that table, for example the near invasion of Poland at the height of the Solidarity movement there.

In mid-April, 1992, the government of Belarus decreed price hikes on fuel, energy, transportation, medicines, and vodka. This was explained by what the government no doubt correctly termed a "sharp increase" in the share of energy supplies being sold to Belarus (by Russia) at "free prices," resulting in pass-through increases in refining and in the cost of transportation and communal services. (Probably the rise in vodka prices was also intended to help stem alcoholism, which was a severe and growing problem in the post-Soviet confusion.) In the same decree the government stated its intention to subsidize energy supplies and services dependent on them, e.g. mass transport. A government official noted that if the price of a ticket on a city bus (then 40 kopecks) were to reflect the true cost of the service, the price would have to be raised 11.5 times.

Belarus, fortunately, benefitted from a relatively high standard of living, at least in the Soviet context. Belarus also had a high level of education and scientific achievement, reflected, for example, in the fact that the Soviet-era computer and radio/TV industries were concentrated there. Belarus also produced, again by Soviet standards, high quality trucks and tractors. Also, the military-industrial sector was strong in Belarus. The downside of all these factors, however, was that Belarus society was deeply penetrated by Russians, resulting in a complicated set of problems when the fledgling sovereign state tried to codify its national identity and symbols.

Our relations with the government were, by and large, excellent. The first Belarusian head of state—following Soviet practice and in the absence of a new constitution—was the chairman of the Supreme Soviet, Stanislau Shushkevich. He had come into that position in September, 1991, after the failed coup attempt against Gorbachev which the previous chairman, Nikolay Dementyey, had supported. Shushkevich and I became close friends, and we remain so to this day. I admire and respect him. Unfortunately, the Supreme Soviet chairmanship carried with it very little political power—not in Belarus, not in Moscow. In the communist setup, of course, the person wielding ultimate power was the First/General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. In post-Soviet Belarus the real power resided with the chair-

man of the Council of Ministers, or Prime Minister, who at independence was Vyachislav Kebich.

One now-amusing but then very embarrassing moment came for me the day I presented my credentials as ambassador to Shushkevich as titular head of state. My wife and I were in our embassy car on the way to the ceremony, flag flying, accompanied by Belarusian security and protocol vehicles. We got about halfway to the site when I realized I had forgotten my credentials back at the embassy. I told my driver to turn around and go back. So the whole motorcade turned around, went back, and I got the document. We arrived breathlessly and late, but Shushkevich was the model of geniality and good will, and he welcomed the forgetful ambassador and his wife as if nothing had happened.

True renaissance has only been interrupted ... Its day will come

Belarus, like Ukraine, was blessed with a fully functional foreign ministry when independence occurred. That was because both had been founding members of the United Nations in a scheme Stalin managed to push through which gave the U.S.S.R. three votes in the U.N. rather than just one. Belarus' foreign minister in 1992 was Pyotr Kravchanka, a self-promoting apparatchik. He was of course subordinate to Kebich, not Shushkevich. Kravchanka at first exuded good will and bonhomie to me and my staff, which we of course reciprocated. But over time I came to realize he was promoting himself and his personal agenda, not that of his country. Also, of course, Kravchanka realized I had full access to his boss, Kebich, who on more than one occasion at my urging (and once in my presence) reversed one or another course of action Kravchanka was pushing.

A particularly critical moment occurred in late spring of 1993 when President Clinton invited Chairman Shushkevich to visit him in Washington. This was a sign of respect over the fact that Belarus had become the first of the three non-Russian post-Soviet countries to give up the nuclear weapons that were on its territory at the end of 1991. Kravchanka tried to plant the story in the State Department and the National Security Council staff—through Belarus' ambassador in Washington and until recently Mr. Lukashenka's foreign minister, Sergey Martynov—that Shushkevich respectfully declined President Clinton's invitation. Of course, this was nonsense. I found out about it immediately, and the visit was put back on track.

I left Belarus shortly after joining Chairman Shushkevich in welcoming President and Mrs. Clinton to Minsk in January, 1994. It would be nice to confirm that true renaissance had taken root in Belarus by then, but unfortunately the roots were not yet deep enough. A parliamentary coup ousted Shushkevich within days of the Clinton visit. These events in themselves deserve careful analysis and reporting, but they lie beyond the scope of this article. Recidivism quickly set in, beginning with the presidential election in the summer of 1994. It continues still. But the true renaissance has only been interrupted for a time. Its day will come.

West Doesn't Recognize The Elections

The elections in Belarus were neither free nor impartial.

That is the essence of the preliminary report of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE.

The report was presented on 24 September at a briefing in Minsk. The final report of the OSCE observers is planned to be prepared in the next two month, BelaPAN reports.

"Many responsibilities in the framework of the OSCE regarding democratic rights of the citizens for free running as a candidate and the possibility to freely express opinions were not followed", - the report says.

"The elections were not held impartially and the appellation process didn't guarantee an effective means for protection", - the observers highlight.

"The elections were not competitive from the very beginning", - the short-term OSCE mission's head **Mateo Mecacci** said. – Free elections depend on the people's possibility speak freely and freely run for office and organize themselves, which we didn't see in that campaign".

At the same time he highlighted: "We are still ready to work with Belarus on taking the next necessary steps, which is in our mutual interest"

A Statement by the President of the European Parliament

As reported by Radio Liberty, **Martin Schulz, the President of the European Parliament** made the following statement regarding the elections: "I deeply regret that the parliamentary elections in Belarus, again did not conform to the international standards of a free and transparent electoral process. In a situation -- when opposition leaders remain in prison, when opposition candidates are denied registration, when the people' voices are muzzled -- what took place, was an electoral farce.

I regret that in this situation, the European Parliament cannot renew formal relations with the Belarusian parliament. I have long ago lost any illusions regarding the good will of the Belarusian authorities to assume responsibility in introducing democratic reforms. The European Union must finally work out an effective strategy on relations with Belarus -- that is to determine how to forcefully react to the disturbing violations of human rights and the supremacy of law -- and how to support Belarus's people and its civic society that is struggling with many difficulties.

United States State Department Press Statement

The September 23 parliamentary elections in Belarus fell short of international standards and their conduct cannot be considered free or fair… The United States urges the authorities to take steps to meet Belarus's international commitments to hold genuinely democratic elections and to foster respect for human rights. **Enhanced respect for democracy and human rights in Belarus, including the release and rehabilitation of all political prisoners, remains central to improving bilateral relations with the United States.**

False Memories

The Second World War has cult status in Belarus where its history is beyond questioning. David R Marples has first-hand experience of the heavy hand of the state

For the past three years I have been working on the topic of memory and war in Belarus. Like any visitor to that country– and I have been going there for the past 20 years regularly – I was fascinated and intrigued by the prevalence of Second World War memorials. No matter where one went, there was a war monument. The most important official occasions in the country, especially Independence Day on 3 July, are commemorations of the war. At those times, the capital Minsk hosts an elaborate military parade attended by President Alexander Lukashenko and his third son Mikalay, who was born in 2004.

Both, improbably, wear the uniform of a general.

There are a growing number of historic sites of significance in Belarus. Some date from Soviet times, such as the Khatyn Memorial Complex and the Brest Hero Fortress. Others are of more recent origin, such as the Stalin Line Museum near Zaslavl, some 27 kilometers from Minsk.

Monuments abound, mostly but not always in memory of partisan heroes,such as 14-year-old Marat Kazey who died after an encounter with the German occupants or Konstantin Zaslonov, also known as partisan leader

Dyadya Kostya, who died in the village of Kupovat, Vitsebsk region, on 14 November 1942, and now has a statue in his memory at the railway station in Vorsha.

The focus on the war is hardly surprising. Belarus lost, according to official figures, about one-third of its population during the war years. It suffered a brutal occupation. Its Jewish population was virtually wiped out.

Many villages and settlements were destroyed. The city of Minsk lost its entire centre. Still, it seemed to me that the war, which ended 67 years ago, was also an instrument of nation-building. Lukashenko became president in July 1994, and has remained in place by cowing his opponents and manipulating elections, as well as by maintaining a largely state-run economy sponsored by cheap Russian imports for many years. Like many dictators or would-be dictators, one facet of his leadership has been a constant quest for legitimacy.

Belarus lost.. about one-third of its population during the war years

He has found it in part by identifying his regime with the wartime Soviet republic, and by raising the war to the status of a modern-day cult, the events of which can no longer be questioned. My study was not the usual historian's route of heading for the National Archives and requesting permission to examine various documents, though I have done that in the past. I was more concerned with the dissemination and narratives of the war permeating through the media, school textbooks, historic sites, and monuments. Most interesting of all was the question of generations: how could genuine links be formed between the remaining war veterans, who are now over 85 years of age, and schoolchildren?

I found Belarusians ready to assist at every point. Friends, acquaintances, librarians, politicians, newspaper editors and journalists all came to my aid. I visited all the sites named above, some of them more than once.

I spent hours in the Museum of the Great Patriotic War in Minsk. I perused newspapers from different regions of the country to read their accounts of the war. I grabbed every school textbook on which I could lay hands, purchasing many of them in local bookstores. I watched TV documentaries, the recent Russian-Belarusian film about the Brest Fortress, visited exhibits at the Minsk Museum of History, and wandered through a number of villages and towns to locate monuments. Now at the stage of writing up some conclusions, I am even more convinced that the usage of the war is largely, though not totally, state propaganda.

One point needs to be stressed at the outset. Though about one-third of Belarus's war victims were Jews, the Holocaust is not a major topic. It is barely mentioned in school textbooks. Most of the monuments and sites do not distinguish between Jewish and general Soviet deaths, following the practices of the old USSR. Monuments to the Holocaust are usually funded from abroad. The contemporary glorification of the war is about partisans rather than Jews, though sometimes the two were synonymous, as anyone who has watched the 2008 film Defiance, starring Daniel Craig, will testify.

Another controversial issue is anti-Soviet opposition during the war. Officially approved texts contain a statement that they have the approval of the Ministry of Education. One will search in vain for any information about how the population of Belarus first received news about the war, even though many initially welcomed the invaders. Rather, one hears about the treachery of the attack, the brave response and defensive battles to slow down the attackers, and the unity of the population against the enemy. Little distinction is made between the former term 'Soviet' to describe inhabitants and the current 'Belarusian'. It is as though the population of the republic were fighting for an independent state.

Admittedly this is not an ethnic entity. All sources note that various people contributed to the defense of Belarus, including Tatars, Kazakhs, and of course Russians. At the same time the Belarusian component receives emphasis, as do those ethnic Belarusians who received the coveted title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

The year 1941 was once billed as a year to be forgotten for the USSR, which appeared unprepared for the timing and scale of the invasion and lost vast territories and most of its industry to the invaders. It has now been resurrected and transformed into a time of defiant resistance. The narrative begins with the defense of the Brest Fortress, where a small group held out for a few weeks before surrendering to the Germans. It continues with the Stalin Line, which, one historian told me, delayed the Germans in their march to Moscow to the extent that Stalin was able to summon forces from the Far Eastand save Moscow. Succinctly put: the Belarusians saved the Soviet

capital. Among others, the German historian Christian Ganzer has largely demythologised the Brest Fortress story. The Germans had occupied Smolensk by the time it was captured. The Stalin Line is completely mythical. It had been demolished before the Germans even got there as the Soviet border moved westward after the Nazi-Soviet Pact. Historians discovered some years ago that even the destruction of the village of Khatyn, site of an infamous massacre,was undertaken by auxiliary police, allegedly as retribution for the death on this same day of German Olympic gold medalist Hans Woellke near-Khatyn, at the hands of Soviet partisans.

The partisans are a different matter. Belarus was certainly the centre of the partisan movement, but there is no consensus on when and how it began. Ultimately it was subordinated to the NKVD, and the Belarusian party leadership under Panteleimon Ponomarenko, one of Stalin's cruellest and most devoted henchmen. If one adds up figures from official accounts of partisan destruction, one learns that they destroyed 28 trains and killed 1,500 Germans daily in 1943–4. No further comment is needed.

Lukashenko regime refuses to focus on Stalinist crimes

By the summer of 1943, the partisans had grown into a mass movement. The following year they coalesced into the Red Army, which destroyed the German Army Group Centre in Operation Bagration. Without doubt they played an important role. But how were they regarded by the local population, which had to feed and billet them? In 2010, local historian Illya Kopyl published a lengthy and critical series about the partisans in the opposition newspaper Narodnaya Volya, focusing on their exploitation of local residents. The result was a picketing of the offices of the newspaper by veterans (some of whom appeared to be too young to have served in the war) and members of the Belarusian Union of Patriotic Youth, an organisation loyal to the president. The newspaper received a warning from the Ministry of Information for 'Disseminating false information that discredits the guerilla movement in Belarus, [and] actions of the Red Army during the Great Patriotic War'. Kopyl was guilty of 'historical revisionism'.

I studied this term at some length because it appears often. Belarusian officials, particularly from the Ministry of Defence, will make comments to the effect that the memory of the war must never be forgotten, but some people would like to change the facts and rewrite its history. They are historical revisionists who should be condemned because the history of the war is sacred and cannot be altered. This sort of rhetoric sounds laughable but it has serious consequences.

It means first of all that it is very difficult for Belarusian historians to attempt serious studies of many facets of the war. To do so means risking their careers and incomes, and being designated as hostile to the prevailing line, i.e. the view perpetuated by the Lukashenko regime, which can be described as the Soviet line with a Belarusian angle. In challenging the official view of the war, historians are potentially undermining the entire history curriculum in schools, which regards the war as the defining event in the Belarusian past, to the virtual exclusion of all others. In most areas of life, the Republic of Belarus is a very different place from Soviet Belarus, but not in the field of 20th-century history. Opponents of the Soviets were bourgeois nationalists, collaborators with the enemy, people who sought to undermine Soviet power, just as the modern opposition in Belarus is often dismissed by the phrase 'enemies of the people' or a 'fifth column' (most recently linked to Germans and Poles).

Revisionists are also challenging a linkage between the Belarusian state of 1945 and the modern version. One Belarusian historian has noted that the word 'repressions' has been removed from textbooks. In the same way, the crimes during Stalinism have also been largely concealed. After the war, many Belarusian partisan leaders were treated with suspicion. The Minsk underground was suspected of treachery. Not until after the death of Stalin were Belarusian 'achievements' in the war recognised. Minsk did not receive its current status of 'hero city' until 1974, 30 years after its liberation from the occupants.

But the Lukashenko regime refuses to focus on Stalinist crimes, such as the executions at Kurapaty (1937–41), where the NKVD executed up to 250,000 people. It denied until recently that the 'Katyn massacres' of Polish officers in Russia included any Polish prisoners from Belarus. Yet recent research by Natalia Lebedeva has confirmed that 1,996 Poles from Western Belarus were among the NKVD victims executed at camps in Kozelsk and Ostashkov (Russia), and Starobelsk (Ukraine). Lukashenko himself has always seemed ambivalent about Stalin, and reluctant to divulge the extent of the purges in Belarus. The bust of Stalin at the entrance to the Stalin Line Museum is usually adorned with wreaths.

The logical deduction is that exposure of the enormity of Stalinist crimes may undermine the myths of the Great Patriotic War in which so many loyal Stalinists served. The regime itself continues to enhance the power and scope of the operations of the KGB. Belarus is thus aintaining the Stalinist legacy.

This summer I had hoped to make a concluding visit to Belarus for the purposes of this study. But my visa application to the Belarusian Embassy in Ottawa was refused. I never did find out why, despite several requests for an explanation. Either it was something to do with the nature of this study, or else my name was added to a 'black list' of those to be refused entry, along with the list of undesirables (mostly opposition members) prevented from leaving the country.

In several respects the 'Partisan Republic' is still fighting enemies, real and mythical, in a world that seems detached from reality. Like Stalin, Lukashenko imagines himself surrounded by enemies and hostile forces. By controlling the publicity and interpretations of the Great Patriotic War, the regime hopes to create its own legacy as a destroyer of fascism, while denying much of the Belarusian past, culture, and continuing the Soviet neglect of the native language. It is a slippery slope, and will be

even more precarious once, as is inevitable, the veterans pass on and there is no one to take part in the ritual of parades and commemorations.

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Source: www.indexoncensorship.org

Unexpected Allies

By David Erkomaishvili

Belarus and Georgia are scarcely ever placed into one basket for analysis. It is rather Belarus' neighbour Ukraine that has been consistently paired up with Georgia in post-Soviet space politics. First wave of colour revolutions that hit the region and swimmingly overthrown corrupt regimes; knife-edge relations with Russia; to name just a few domains where Kiev and Tbilisi were for the most times referred to cheek by jowl. To be sure, Belarus is no stranger when it comes to hurdle in relations with Russia, however, this is not the only resemblance in Belarus-Georgia nexus which steadily develops.

Naturally, Georgian political relations with Ukraine come across as more advanced. The two states which eagerly cast off their Soviet past since the Rose and Orange revolutions swept through the streets of their capitals heralded their allegiance to join EU through NATO. They kick-started GUAM, an organisation on the wane before 2006, contributed troops to international coalitions in Iraq and Afghanistan, and enjoyed sturdy allied link, feasibly the strongest in the entire post-Soviet space, before the departure of Victor Yushchenko in 2010.

Meanwhile, the political relations between Georgia and Belarus have encountered periods of a distrust and at times even tension. However, Tbilisi found itself in a situation where the reality before and after 2008 conflict with Russia has been entirely different. But that is not the only reason why Georgian cooperation with Belarus cannot omit to be boned up on in the shadow cast by both states' relations with Russia.

Minsk-Factor

Ukraine has been Georgia's key ally in the post-Soviet region. Following the colour revolutions of 2003 in Georgia and 2004 in Ukraine political relations sky-rocketed. Tbilisi and Kiev intensified political contacts, jointly bid for NATO-EU membership, and embraced personal friendship of leaders (Viktor Yushchenko is a godfather of Mikheil Saakashvili's child). Subsequent departure of Viktor Yushchenko from Ukrainian political scene, after he failed to qualify for the second round of 2010 presidential elections, cool off relations between the two states as Yushchenko's successor Viktor Yanukovych sought to make up broken relations with Moscow (then-Russian president Dmitri Medvedev accused Yushchenko of anti-Russian policy of supporting Georgia).

Belarus did not recognize Georgia's breakaway regions

With Ukraine busy fixing its domestic and foreign issues, Georgia had found itself without explicit political support of a major ally in the post-Soviet region. Re-examination of difficult circumstances and lessons learnt from the 2008 conflict led to the adoption of the new national security concept in 2011. One of the essential changes advanced by the new concept has become the systematic approach to the foreign policy and notably expanded work with partners. This resulted in a modification of previously employed mechanisms. Tbilisi has set off damage-control, activated its diplomacy to intensify work with key partners in order to promote its position and avoid broad recognition of the breakaway regions. The new concept called international support a prerogative and a "significant deterrent factor" against outbreak of hostilities.

Belarus had hardly been a priority for Georgian diplomacy mainly due to the frailty of the latter. Prior to the 2003 Rose revolution Georgia was a failed state. Despite the fact that diplomatic relations between the two states were set up in 1994 (among all post-Soviet states only relations between Belarus and Tajikistan were established later) Georgian embassy in Minsk had not been opened until 2007.

Nevertheless, even before the conflict, in the course of Russian-imposed economic sanctions, Belarus' role as an alternative market and potential political partner has significantly elevated it for Georgian foreign policy. The new national security concept anchored this modus operandi. While referring to the cooperation with Ukraine as "strategic partnership" the document have designated relations with Belarus as of "huge importance."

Significance of Belarus for Georgia

In the 2008 conflict Belarus, as all other post-Soviet states, did not support Russia (neither did it support Georgia). Importantly, Minsk has been part of CSTO – a post-Soviet alliance with the pledge of military assistance in contingency.

Tbilisi's post-conflict quest for allies has been bold and comprehensive. An outreach to prevent states all over the world from following Kremlin in recognition of independence of the two secessionist regions has seen its most famous effect when the EU and US formally declared their respect for Georgian sovereignty.

The post-Soviet space is important too. On this side Georgian efforts have been slow and fragmentary. Nevertheless, among other states, Belarus with little doubt has been very important. Minsk is the capital of the CIS, an organisation Georgia withdrew from in 2008, and the closest ally of Russia. There is hardly any other post-Soviet state which has such a strategic alliance relations with Moscow.

Georgian objectives in this respect have been twofold. Firstly, if Belarus were to recognise independence of the breakaway regions, the status of CIS capital (hosting organisation's headquarters) would have made consequences leaden for Tbilisi's diplomatic stand off with Russia. Secondly, by diplomatically assisting to ward

Minsk off from recognition Tbilisi might have done well out of the fact that the key Russian ally did not support it, thus indicating that the Russian influence in the post-Soviet space – which it claims to be its sphere of influence – is exaggerated. To be sure, Belarus-Georgian post-1991 relations were never too articulate, lucid, and stable. However for Minsk, this was another option to acquire lever in its own relations with Russia and the West.

Intensification amidst Crisis

Apart from Russia, Minsk's key economic partners in the region have been Ukraine, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan. They account for almost 94 percent of all Belarusian export to the entire CIS region. Georgia is not on that list and its relations with Belarus like no other have significantly oscillated from reasonable interest to antagonism. In 2006 Tbilisi openly backed Belarusian opposition. Georgian Foreign Ministry condemned presidential elections calling them undemocratic and held in an "atmosphere of intimidation." Mikheil Saakashvili described Aliaksandr Lukashenka's regime as "a dark force" trying to oppress democracy.

Nevertheless, since 2007 Belarus and Georgia embarked on wider partnership. In 2010 Georgian leadership stressed the importance of cooperation with Belarus and praised intensification of political contacts paying due respect for not recognising breakaway regions and praising "wise position of the Belarus leadership." Though, in a move to bolster CSTO the same year Aliaksandr Lukashenka made an offer to Russian President Dmitri Medvedev to recognise the secessionist enclaves of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states in case Russia would compensate for the harm in the Belarus ties with EU.

Belarusian leadership proved pragmatic in studying the issue of recognition for two month (June, July 2010) when it found out that there will be significant complications with EU and US possibly taking counter measures including new visa restrictions, IMF and EBRD sanctions, and blocking access to the EU market.

Already in 2012 the Georgian ambassador to Belarus Giorgi Chkheidze visiting Hrodna emphasised Georgia's interest in expanding interregional cooperation with Belarusian regions and underlined that two states "have no problems in relations" except for low economic turnover.

Mutually Beneficial Cooperation

Both states spotted benefits in extended partnership. For Lukashenka, development of ties with Georgia fetches an additional lever in its relations with Russia. Observers noted that political contacts between Minsk and Tbilisi intensified against the background of media campaign in Moscow waged against Lukashenka rule when the documentaries entitled 'The Godfather" and "Europe's Last Dictator" were aired.

This policy is also part of the broader game in relations with the EU. By standing firm on non-recognition Lukashenka gains substantial toe-stand in relations with the EU. For Brussels the position of Minsk is especially important in its own relations with Georgia. The EU diplomats have many times pledged behind the scenes in Tbilisi that no other post-Soviet space states will follow Moscow on the issue.

For Tbilisi, Minsk's support of Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty is essential. Especially if one summons up the fact that Lukashenka has been put under intense pressure form Moscow. Minsk's advice to its citizens against touring Georgian provinces of Abkhazian and South Ossetia, which Tbilisi considers Russian-occupied, is one of the reasons Tbilisi praises this position.

Since the 2008 conflict top Russian officials have condemned Saakashvili and publicly denounced his leadership as illegal and criminal soliciting similar approach from allies, first and foremost from Belarus. By shaking hands with Kremlin's enemy Lukashenka is making use of one of the available channels to demonstrate its independent stance. For Georgia it is yet another opportunity to diplomatically challenge leading Russian position in the post-Soviet space.

Apart from Russia which advocates multilateral co-

By dealing with Kremlin's enemy Lukashenka demonstrates Belarus' independent stance

operative initiatives among post-Soviet states, Georgian intention has been to change the fabric of the regional relations by endorsing horizontal cooperation on equal terms. Tbilisi withdrew from CIS and opted for development of bilateral relations to support its territorial integrity and expand economic cooperation attracting investments.

Another Georgian motivation for developing closer ties with Minsk is in boosting its model of tourist-oriented economy. Developing economic and trade relations with Belarus along with attracting Belarusian tourists to its resorts, Georgia hopes to improve its economic potential especially in the post-conflict foreign capital outflow environment.

An Alliance of Convenience?

How to classify relations between the two and what are the prospects? Questions remain. Mainly, if the Belarus-Georgian relations is a far-fetched move to counter Russia or beginning of a comprehensive cooperation? Are these relations sustainable without reference to Russia?

One of the most important tests so far was the development of the EU's Eastern Partnership initiative. Recent release of new documents by Wikileaks reveals that in 2009 top Georgian officials threatened to withdraw from the EU's program if Belarus extended recognition to Abkhazia and South Ossetia. According to the diplomatic documents, Mikheil Saakashvili insisted that if Belarus were to recognise the separatist regions, and EU would not expel it from the Eastern Partnership, Georgia would be forced to quit. This example illustrates just how issue-dependent relations of the two states are.

Here the issue of recognition became truly interna-

tional involving Russia on the one side, Georgia on the other, the West in the middle with Belarus at the centre. Importantly, the issue put Minsk into the most arduous posture under significant pressure from all sides.

The development of bilateral relations will in many ways depend on whether two parties will be able to depart from the issues linked to the recognition of Georgian breakaway provinces. Positive sign is that relations seem expanding. Nevertheless, negative side to it is that taking into account upcoming constitutional amendments in Georgia which will turn it into de jure parliamentary democracy and unstable economic situation in Belarus relations still do not walk away from supplementing the two states' respective cooperation with Russia and the West.

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ECONOMY

Chinese Capital could Compete With Russian Capital

Current bilateral economic cooperation between Belarus and China is developing rapidly. Chinese economic expansion in Belarus could conflict with Russian economic interests in Belarus. However, China cannot replace Russia, which will remain Belarus' main economic and trade and investment partner in the medium and long-term.

worth approximately USD 6 billion. The total amount of credit lines opened by the Chinese Exim Bank and China Development Bank to finance investment projects in Belarus is USD 16 billion. Therefore there are Chinese loans worth USD 10 billion waiting to finance new investment projects. Currently there are over 100 joint projects under consideration at various stages.

During the official visit to China on July 15-19 by the delegation of the Government and the National Bank of Belarus headed by Deputy Prime Minister Anatoly Tozik, the parties discussed the setting of a Belarusian-Chinese investment fund and financing the construction of the infrastructure in the Belarusian-Chinese industrial park. The Belarusian delegation met with the leadership of the Ministry of Commerce, the People's Bank of China Eximbank, the State Development Bank, as well as with heads of a number of Chinese corporations, which implement major investment projects in Belarus.

In turn, the National Bank of Belarus and the People's Bank of China discussed the possibility to increase the share of payments in Chinese Yuan in mutual trade and Chinese investment (as part of a swap agreement between the national banks concluded in 2009).

China's Development Bank allocates a USD 296.348 million and Yuan 328.575 million loan for Belarus within an investment project regarding technical re-equipment of a Dobrush Paper Mill branch Belarusian Wallpaper. The total amount of the loan is USD 347.9 million. The loan repayment is due between January 1st, 2016 and December 31st, 2025.

It should be noted that as a rule China allocates 're-lated' loans for Belarus, which are linked to the supply of Chinese goods in the country. Therefore, the growth in external debt to China is complemented by the increase in imports of Chinese products and growing negative trade balance between Belarus and China (see Table 2).

Year	Goods export		Goods import		Balance, USD million.
	USD, million	Volume, %	USD, million	Volume, %	
2005	431.0	2.7	284.1	1.7	146.9
2006	399.1	2.0	548.6	2.5	-149.5
2007	484.7	2.0	815.8	2.8	-331.1
2008	613.4	1.9	1414.8	3.6	-801.4
2009	174.0	0.8	1080.1	3.8	-906.1
2010	475.8	1.9	1684.1	4.8	-1208.3
2011	637.1	1.6	2193.7	4.8	-1556.6
January-May 2012	217.0	1.0	747.9	3.8	-530.9

Table 2

Foreign trade dynamics between Belarus and China Source: The National Statistics Committee of Belarus, own calculations.

Currently Belarus is implementing Chinese investment projects within contracts and loan agreements

For example, in 2011 the imports of Chinese goods in Belarus increased compared to 2005 by more than 7.7 times to a record high USD 2.194 billion. Negative foreign trade balance between Belarus and China in 2011 broke the record: - USD 1.557 billion against + USD 146.9 million in 2005.

According to the National Statistics Committee, the export of Belarusian goods to China in January-May 2012 increased compared with the same period in 2011 by 10.7% to USD 217 million (its share in overall Belarusian exports of goods was 1%). Goods imports from China, by contrast, dropped by 5.5% to USD 747.9 million (share in total Belarusian imports was 3.8%). The negative foreign trade balance during January – May 2012 was minus USD 530.9 million.

Overall, the Chinese share in the Belarusian foreign trade in January-May 2012 was 2.4%. The major Belarusian trade partners during that period were as follows: Russia - 46.9%, the Netherlands - 12.3%, Ukraine - 7.1%, Latvia - 5.4%, Germany - 4.1% Poland - 2.2%, Italy and Lithuania - 1.7% Brazil - 1.1%, Kazakhstan - 1%, Estonia and Venezuela - to 0.8%, United Kingdom - 0.7%.

Belarus' major exports to China in January-May 2012 were potash fertilizers, heterocyclic compounds containing nitrogen atoms, polyamides, and trucks. There were no deliveries of potash fertilizers to China in Q1 2012. However, in April they resumed and made USD 99.163 million. The average price of exported potash fertilizers to China in April-May 2012 was USD 700.3 per ton.

At the same time, the list of Chinese goods shipped to Belarus is more diverse. During that period China exported: communications equipment and parts thereof; computers for automated data processing, parts and accessories for automobiles and tractors, shoes and shoe parts, electric railway locomotives, plates, sheets and strip, aluminum, parts receiving and transmitting equipment; heterocyclic compounds containing nitrogen atoms, antibiotics, insecticides, herbicides, equipment for processing rubber and plastics.

Nevertheless, direct Chinese investment inflow is low in Belarus. Our assessment is that Chinese leadership will continue providing related loans in order to maintain inflow of Chinese exports to Belarus. Moreover, loans to Belarus in terms of interest rates are more profitable in comparison with investments in foreign debt securities, where return rates equal LIBOR rate (approximately 1-2%)

Source: Solidarity with Belarus Information Office, July 24, 2012

Quotes of Quarter

In an interview carried by Radio Liberty on August 24 German Bundestag member **MARIELUISE BECK** stated: "

We have information about an unacceptable involvement of Interpol in the show trial of **Uladzislau Kavalyou** and **Dzmitry Kanavalau**, who were (promptly) executed, but, according to legal criteria, were innocent. On May 12, 2011, the Secretary General of Interpol **Ronald Noble** suspended his participation in the European regional conference in Malta in order to meet with the Head of Interior Ministry of Belarus **Anatol Kuliashou** in Minsk. The visit was related to the attack in Minsk Metro in April".

BELARUS' FORUM

Teddy-Bear Airdrop Over Belarus

On July 4, the Swedish media published a video of a single-engine airplane with two passengers on board crossing Belarus' border from the territory of Lithuania and parachuting teddy-bears with texts in support of freedom of speech in Belarus over the town of Ivyanets, approaching the capital Minsk.

The Authorities Choose How to Respond

The level of media publicity drawn by the incident establishes a framework for response from the Belarusian authorities. They vary from strictly punishing and dismissing the guilty persons to acknowledging drawbacks in the air defense system and the need for modernization. In reality, the authorities have avoided choosing between these two extremes and have postponed taking a decision, due to their reluctance to acknowledge the mistake. Their unwillingness to make a final decision is also explained by an acute shortage of management personnel in the Air Force, the high cost of retrofitting an air defense system and the lack of reaction from Russia.

There is evidence that confirms the incident. Swedish activists presented a video recording of the flight, there is evidence from local citizens and Ivanyets' Chief of the Communal service, as well as a press release from the Lithuanian Air Forces which acknowledges a violation of their airspace on July 4. According to the Swedish activists, the duration of the flight over Belarusian territory was about an hour and a half.

However, the Belarusian State Border Committee denies the fact that Belarus' airspace was violated. The Belarusian Ministry of Defense issued a statement saying that the video and photos of the flight were crude fakes. Such a restrained stance of the Belarusian law enforcement agencies is explained by at least three factors.

Firstly, the commanders of the Air Force and Air Defense Forces are unwilling to acknowledge their mistake, especially after the national holiday on July 3, Independence Day, during which the special honor is given to the military forces (the incident occurred the morning after the holiday).

Secondly, commanders of Belarus' Air Force and Air Defense Forces have been changed twice in the last eighteen months. To acknowledge such a grave mistake would lead to the recently appointed officers being dismissed.

Finally, on July 5, President Lukashenka took part in the commencement of the Faculty of General Staff of the Armed Forces Academy of Belarus, where he personally handed the diplomas and awards to graduates, among whom were also soldiers from Russia and Kazakhstan.

Even if Belarusian military officials have not found the courage to report to Lukashenka about the incident, he has reasons not to give any comment on the mistake

of the Belarusian air defense system which is a part of Russia and Belarus' joint regional air defense system.

Belarusian authorities prefer to avoid deciding how to respond. They continue to keep silent about the incident. The Belarusian authorities might be forced to take action in the near future if Russia reacts to the incident. If the attention from the media or Russia's law enforcement agencies increases, Belarus will have to respond. A decline in attention will most likely allow the issue to drift; several officials from the Ministry of Defense might be dismissed without attracting public attention.

Source: Solidarity with Belarus Information Office July 9, 2012

Swedish Pilot Describes the Airdrop

Residents of a small town outside the Belarusian capital and the Swedish man who says he flew the plane in question have confirmed reports of a bizarre stunt to promote free speech by illegally entering Belarusian airspace and dropping teddy bears from an airplane.

Belarusian authorities deny any such incursion happened. Officials in neighboring Lithuania have acknowledged a violation of their airspace on July 4 and are investigating whether an aircraft used their territory en route to such an airdrop.

But Swede Tomas Mazetti, who claims to have piloted the single-engine plane, described his actions to RFE/RL in detail, saying the whole risky "Teddybear Airdrop Minsk 2012" venture was intended to draw attention to longstanding obstacles to free speech in Belarus.

"The situation has been the same in almost 20 years and it has become worse lately," Mazetti told RFE/RL Brussels correspondent Rikard Jozwiak. "At least I hope that in some way that we can show them there is a whole world out there that actually cares about this."

Mazetti and organizers stressed their awareness of the risks but cited their commitment to their work with "the free Belarusian movement for free speech [including] Charter 97 and the "Tell The Truth" movement."

Teddy Bears With 'Foreign' Messages

A number of locals confirmed to RFE/RL's Belarus Service that they saw an airplane early on July 4 disgorging large numbers of dark-colored bags over their town of Ivyanets, about 50 kilometers from Minsk and 80 kilometers from the Lithuanian border.



You can't force us to keep silent
Toys demand defense of human rights in Belarus

Two of the eyewitnesses said the packages had "foreign" messages and contained teddy bears with parachutes attached to them.

The director of local community services in Ivyanets, Uladzimir Rudy, told RFE/RL he couldn't say for sure whether his subordinates found any stuffed animals, adding that there was a lot to clean up after the Republic Day festivities.

Flying On Faith

Mazetti's advertising agency, Studio Total, issued a press release on July 4 touting the operation, saying the "small single-engine airplane illegally entered Belarussian [sic] airspace" intending to fly to Minsk.

It was said to have taken off from an airport in Pocenai, southeast of Kaunas, in Lithuania.

The press release says "the airplane was loaded with 1,000 teddy bears holding signs demanding the right to free speech in English and Belarusian."

The attached messages read, "It's impossible to silence us" in Belarusian as well as the foreign text.

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, July 5, 2012

Top Military Officials Fired

Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has dismissed two top military officials over the July 4 teddy-bear airdrop incident.

The president's office announced on July 30th that the chairman of the State Border Guard Committee, Major General Ihar Rachkouski, and the commander of the country's air forces, Major General Dzmitry Pakhmelkin, were released from their posts for "improperly carrying out their duties."

Lukashenka said last week that all military officials who were responsible for "letting a Swedish plane enter Belarus's air space" would be punished.

And, indeed they were punished. The Minister of Defense Lt.General Jury Zhadobin and the head of the General Staff, First Deputy Minister of Defense Major General Piotr Tsikhanouski were given warnings.

Reprimands were given to the Belarus' top military official Col.General Leanid Maltsau, and the Head of KGB Lt.General Vadzim Zaitsau.

Earlier, on July 16 (twelve days after the airdrop incident) Lukashenka gave out awards to 44 lower ranking officers of the Air Defense forces for "exemplary performance of their assigneed duties."

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, July 31, 2012

Quotes of Quarter

Appointing a new head of the State Border Committee, **ALEXANDER LUKASHENKA** told the official state agency BelTA on August 2 that violations of the state border should not be unpunished and must be prevented by all means. He commented on recent high level firing decisions.

"With regard to the recent decisions, including staff decisions, there is nothing drastic in that. On the contrary – we didn't punish them enough. In Soviet times for such things they would be put behind bars".

German Authorities Defend Belarus Police Training

A political storm in Berlin over why German police were training Belarusian security forces as late as last year is increasingly turning into a spat between Germany and the EU.

Brussels imposed tough sanctions on Belarus in January 2011 to punish Minsk's crackdown on opposition parties. But a German police training program that began in 2008 continued for as long as eight months after the sanctions began.

Marcin Grajewski, a spokesman for European Parliament President Martin Schulz, said that it is "very surprising news."

"It should be explained, it should be clarified. We need to establish facts and those in charge should state what really happened," Grajewski said.

The training, which included introducing Belarusian police to German riot control techniques, has particularly stirred controversy because it went on despite the Minsk police brutally charging protesters the day after President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's December 2010 reelection. Belarusian police used batons and stun grenades, injuring dozens of people and arresting some 600.

The Belarusian Interior Ministry says the training involved actions such as combating auto theft and illegal immigration and carrying out crowd control at sporting events and did not include "any practical lessons" in how to suppress demonstrations.

Outer Borders'

German Interior Ministry spokesman Philipp Spauschus told RFE/RL that the training program is something the EU itself approved some five years ago when relations between Europe and Belarus were improving.

"The so-called 'outer borders' of the EU had migrated eastward [in 2007-2008] and that's when a plan was made to cooperate with Belarus [in the fields of border police and illegal immigration]," Spauschus said.

"It was ultimately a joint decision by European [Union] security officials but also a large part from the German government, the Federal Criminal Police Office, and federal police to provide educational training [for Belarusian police officials] in Germany and also in Belarus."

Spauschus also said other European countries were involved in the training. He could not, however, recall which countries they were or what areas of training they conducted.

It also remains unclear just who in Brussels approved the training program.

Belarus was widely criticized for its crackdown on postelection protests in December 2010.

The European Council -- the collective presidency of the EU -- said it did not know about it. And the European Commission, the EU's executive body, said it will have to do some research before giving a definitive answer.

Commission officials tell RFE/RL that they are going through their documents to see if the police training program was among the measures it approved "at the working group level" when the EU's relationship with Belarus seemed to be improving back in 2008.

The scandal over the program began earlier this month as a political controversy in Germany when Matthias Seegar, chief of the federal police, denied allegations that the police had questionable ties with Minsk.

Seegar said German police contacts with Minsk had ended two years ago and that the only contacts had been with the Belarusian border patrol.

But then, in response to an inquiry into police operations abroad by the opposition Left Party, the government revealed that the training of Belarusian police officers was still going on as late as last year.

Seegar was subsequently relieved of his duties for reasons that remain unclear.

In recent days, German media have sought to piece together a full picture of the training program.

The daily "Tagesspeigel" has reported that at least 100 members of the Belarusian security forces participated in training sessions in Germany between 2008 and 2011. It says the German Interior Ministry confirmed that number.

Water Cannon And Tear Gas

The paper also reported German agents travelled to Belarus to train about 400 border police, forensic scientists, and other security officers. And in November 2010, Belarusian security forces accompanied German police as observers at an anti-nuclear-waste demonstration where water cannon, batons, and tear gas were used.

Then, just three weeks after European-Belarus relations plummeted with Lukashenka's crackdown on the opposition and tough new EU sanctions, new training was conducted in Belarus from February 21-25. According to German state broadcaster Deutsche Welle, the last seminar under the program took place in October 2011.

German federal police chief was relieved of duties despite denying allegations of questionable ties with Minsk

Germany's Interior Ministry issued a statement late last week saying that any activities conducted in 2011 would have been "remainders of earlier assignments that had to be completed."

German police say the program was intended to promote awareness among the Belarusian security forces about democracy and the rule of law.

And, as Interior Ministry spokesman Spauschus explains, they reject some newspaper reports that the German government provided not only training and equipment but also crowd-control equipment including batons.

"It is true that computer and camera equipment in a so-called 'equipment-aid program' for the [Belarusian Interior Ministry] forces were delivered to Belarus. This took place between 2008 and 2010 and focused on lap-

tops, video projectors, computers, printers, and fax machines," Spauschus said.

"But the charges that [Germany] also delivered police batons or other such equipment [to Belarus] have been made. We have reviewed [our records] and have found no instances of batons or other similar equipment ever being delivered by the German national government to Belarus."

RFE/RL correspondents Rikard Jozwiak in Brussels and Pete Baumgartner in Prague contributed to this report. RFE/RL's Belarus Service also contributed.

Source: Radio Free Europe//Radio Liberty, August 29, 2012

The Story of an Unnecessary Conflict

By Kirył Kaścian

The 4th Congress of Polish Diaspora held in Pułtusk on August 24-26, 2012, adopted a resolution expressing its "strong protest against violation of human rights and discrimination of the Union of Poles in Belarus". This statement implies that the rights of Belarusian Poles are being violated which results in discrimination of this group on ground of ethnicity. But is this statement mature enough to produce such apparently far-reaching conclusions?

The issue of Belarusian Poles has in recent years become an important topic in Warsaw policies toward Belarus and to a certain degree paralyzed bilateral relations between the two countries. The Union of Poles in Belarus (ZPB), once the biggest non-governmental NGO in Belarus which represented interests of this indigenous minority, underwent a crisis in 2005, caused by the different interpretation of results of the 5th ZPB congress and the legitimacy of Anžalika Borys' election as chairperson of the Union. The results were recognized by the Polish government but dismissed by the Belarusian authorities that found violations in nominating candidates. As a consequence, there are two organisations called "The Union of Poles in Belarus" active in the country.

The resolution of the Congress rests apparently on an _appeal_made by the "illegal" "Union of Poles" currently led by Anžalika Arechva. In this appeal members of the ZPB which is recognized by Warsaw argue that among all Poland's eastern neighbours the situation of the Polish minority in Belarus is the most "difficult and complicated". It stated that there exist only three organizations serving interests of the Polish minority; and the ZPB which is the largest one is not recognized by the Belarusian state and illegalized. Moreover, 16 Polish Houses were taken over by Belarusian authorities under the pretext of establishing the "state-controlled" ZPB and its subsequent acquisition of the property of the "independent" ZPB. As a result, argues the "illegal" ZPB, Poles in Belarus are invigilated and suspected of "realizing a scenario hostile to the Belarusian state". The general climate in which Polish organizations have to act after 2005 is being described as "repressions, chicanery, confiscation of property, and forfeit of the legal status against the background of fierce state propaganda against Poland."

The issue of the attitude towards two Unions of Poles in Belarus by Polish media and elites may be described according to a formula: "Union of Poles in Belarus is not recognized by the Belarusian state and is illegalized"

I have raised the Polish minority factor in the Belarusian-Polish relations last year in my article "Does Poland really know Belarus?" which represents several comments on Jarosław Kaczyński's text "Sikorski Lost Belarus" published on 2 February, 2011 in the prominent Polish daily *Rzeczpospolita*. It seems to be still relevant, so a part of it can be quoted here with some minor alterations.

In Belarusian-Polish relations, the minority issue is probably the aspect most often misinterpreted by Polish elites. Where the Polish minority could be brought into service as a bridge in relations, instead politicians and the media typically portray them as being harassed and repressed. Polish elites charge Lukašenka with disrespecting and violating the rights of the Polish minority. Without going into this complex matter, it seems that Polish elites define as Belarusian Poles those who belong to the "illegal" Union of Poles and the pressure of the Belarusian authorities on this group's members is interpreted as repression of the Polish minority as a whole. This argument represents a blatant misconception of the difference between the collective rights of minorities and individual rights of people to freely declare their ethnicity on one hand and the right for freedom of assembly on the other hand. One of the 2010 presidential candidates, economist Jaraslaŭ Ramančuk, is an ethnic Pole who openly speaks about it and is not associated with the "official" Union of Poles. His electorate, however, went far beyond the support of ethnic Poles.

A more useful approach to this issue was suggested by Waldemar Tomaszewski, an ethnic Polish member of the European Parliament from Lithuania who argues that the Polish minority question should be seen of a much broader human rights problem with the restriction of the freedom of assembly in Belarus. Tomaszewski's assessment goes along with the fact that despite undemocratic ruling practices, some experts emphasize the conflict-free interethnic and inter-denominational situation in Belarus.

Within the context of the above-mentioned problematics it seems relevant to address another detail of the abovementioned 4th Congress of Polish Diaspora raised by Jan Kobylański, the head of USOPAŁ (Latin-American Union of Polish Associations and Organizations). In his message_to the Congress, Kobylański addressed the issue of the so-called Radosław Sikorski's "black list". According to Kobylański, this list exists for already four years and contains the names of representatives of Polish organizations all over the world who due to different political reasons are formally recognized as *persona non grata* in Poland. Moreover, it is stated that Polish diplomatic representations should refrain from contacts with such personalities. As a result people are not able to perform their duties; it also decreases the level of their activities.

The issue raised by Kobylański is also the problem faced by the leadership of the official Union of Poles

in Belarus. Most of them are banned from entering Poland by Polish authorities. This practice, according to Miečyslaŭ Lysy, acting chairperson of the official ZPB, repels people from vigorous activities. This problem seems to be well-known in Belarus but people are not willing to raise it since it might bring negative consequences for them since the ban for visiting Poland automatically means a ban for visiting the entire EU.

The situation resembles a dead-end which does not provide any possibility to move forward. As a solution, the merger of two ethnic Polish organizations may be proposed so that this re-established organization could act as an umbrella entity for all Belarusian citizens of Polish ethnicity. However, this requires a compromise between the official Minsk and Warsaw which despite strained relations between two countries might be achieved *ad hoc*. Since a minority could be brought into service as a bridge in relations between neighbouring countries, it is reasonable in this case to address the potential of the Belarusian minority in Poland which has never been considered by the Polish government in its relations with Belarus.

CULTURE

A New Institute Of Belarusian Studies

By Anatol Taras

The Belarusian Institute for History and Culture (BIHC) was officially registered in Riga, Latvia at the end of March 2012.

Latvia was chosen as the base for the Institute because the organizers wished to distance themselves from various "accidents". However, nearly all the activities of the Institute are taking place in Belarus and for Belarusians.

The major focus of this non-governmental, non-political and non-profit public association is to promote knowledge of the history and culture of the Belarusian nation. Its goal is to form the national identity of citizens of Belarus.

The ideological platform of the leaders and members of the Institute is Belarusian nationalism and the Christian tradition of the Belarusian nation.

The institute is directed by Viktar Jaŭmienienka, M.A. in economics. Scientific Secretary is Anatol Taras, professor, doctor of information technologies.

Ongoing Projects

The BIHC gathered a small group of people who have been pursuing their work on the promotion of knowledge of Belarusian history and culture for more than five years. Our achievements are:

1. Publication of books in the series "Hidden History" (*Nieviadomaja historyja*). As of June 7, 2012, 24 books on Belarusian history and culture have been published. Another 6 titles are currently in preparation for publishing.

2. Publication of the historical almanac "Dziady". Nine issues have been published, the tenth issue is scheduled for September 2012. It contains 304 pages and 190 illustrations.

3. Monthly public lectures on Belarusian history from ancient times to our days. Ten lectures have been delivered, another three are being scheduled. All of them are recorded on video and are available in the internet on the website of the BIHC. After completion of this course, a new set of 18 lectures on Belarusian culture is being scheduled to begin in November 2012 on.

4. Creation of a gallery of photographic portraits: first, modern figures of Belarusian culture; second, reconstructions of appearances of the ancient inhabitants of Belarus. A reconstructions album is to be published by the end of this year.

5. Organization of scientific and practical conferences and seminars. For instance, two conferences on the ethnogeny of Belarusians have been organized. A conference devoted to the modern Belarusian ideology is scheduled for Autumn 2012

Planned projects

Among the projects that are currently being prepared and are to be launched in Autumn 2012 the most significant are:

1. Series of animated films on Belarusian history (50 films, 2 minutes each).

2. Serie s of brochures about the prominent personalities of Belarusian culture, literature and arts (100 brochures).

3. Series of books devoted to the fundamental analysis of the national idea and Belarusian nationalism (Belarus was, is, will be / *Biełaruś była, jość, budzie*).

4. Belarusian history amateurs' association named after Vacłaŭ Łastoŭski) which is to unite regional ethnographers. The society will publish their studies in an annual journals (*Zapisy tavarystva*).

The Institute pursues all its projects at its own expense without relying on any third-party support, even though contributions are more than welcome. Therefore, much more could be done, if not for the lack of finances, the major problem of the BIHC. The educational role of the BIHC should not be underestimated since Belarusian authorities do not realize that the formed national self-consciousness of citizens is a major guarantee for the state sovereignty.

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International Recognition Of Belarusian Lacinka

By Kiryl Kaścian

The participants of the Tenth Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names that took place at the United Nations Headquarters in New York between July 31st and August 10th, 2012 have approved the system of the Roman alphabet transliteration of Belarusian geographical names proposed by the State Committee on Property of the Republic of Belarus.

The conference hosted more than 150 delegates who gathered to discuss standardization of geographical names and to promote their consistent and accurate use.

The Romanization system of Belarusian geographical names submitted by the Belarusian authorities for international approval is based on the long-standing traditional form of the Belarusian language called Lacinka which was widely used by the Belarusian authors in the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries. As Belarusian authorities stress in their report, Lacinka "was well adapted for the specific features of Belarusian language."

The Regulation on the Roman alphabet transliteration of Belarusian geographical names was prepared and approved by the State Committee for Land Resources, Geodesy and Cartography of the Republic of Belarus in November, 2000. Since 2001 it has been used in cartography and other spheres designed for national and international use.

In 2006 the Regulation was accessed by the UNGEGN Working Group on Romanization Systems which recognized that it complies with the requirements necessary of the National. system of transliteration. Suggestions made by international experts were taken into consideration in the preparation of the second version of the Regulation on the Roman alphabet transliteration of Belarusian geographical names which was adopted in June 2007. National system transliteration was submitted to the UNGEGN Working Group on Romanization Systems in May, 2012. It was recognized "to be reversible and understandable by the population of many countries" and met no objections from international experts.

Currently the Romanization system of Belarusian geographical names is used in maps production, tourism and other documents for national and international use.

Thus, the system for the Roman alphabet transliteration of Belarusian geographical names based on Lacinka has been recognized internationally and meets all international standards for transliteration of the geographic names.

Let us hope, that both Belarusian authorities and a wide international audience will start actively using it in their work and thus emphasize the distinctiveness and recognizability of Belarus and its language internationally. Because of its reversibility Lacinka creates a unique opportunity for scholars who are dealing with Belarus-related issues to avoid many inconsistencies and misspellings caused by the attempts to adapt the LOC rules (both Belarusian and Russian) to Belarusian geographical names.

Belarus Used to be a "Cinderella" Between Poland and Russia.

Interview with Prof. Adam Maldzis.

In his exclusive interview with *The_Point Journal/ Belarusian Review* professor Adam Maldzis, an internationally known Belarusist evaluates the various periods of national politics in Belarus of the XX century and describes Belarusians' differences from their neighbors, and how the newly re-established Belarusian state was perceived in the world.

The_Point Journal/Belarusian Review: How would you characterize Soviet policies in the realms of culture and language in Belarus? How did they differ from those in neighboring republics?

Adam Maldzis: Soviet policies in these realms varied by period. In the 1920s they were favorably disposed toward the Belarusian culture and language. In the next decade of 1930s they were restrictive and cruel, yet served as a "window dressing" for the outside world. During the World War II, and the first post-war years they were forced to become more liberal. During the Khrushchev and Brezhnev era we -as first among the non-Russians - were supposed to run to the common feeding trough called the Soviet Union. And we ran! And believed ! And our neighbors, especially the Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians just pretended to run since they had already for two decades lived with other throughs, and had enough time to develop as nations.

T_P/BR: What phases could you define in the development of cultural and language policies in the independent Belarusian state? What are their primary features?

AM: I can see two phases. In the beginning of the 1990s — prevailing enthusiasm, not reinforced by the serious, meticulous, "grey," work, as described in one of our anthems.. A perception prevailed that society would change overnight, by replacing minuses with pluses, emphasis on the social with that on the national. And the broader society, the very voters, had to be brought up, often for many years, as it was done in Russia or Poland. This period was followed by disappointment, both in Belarusianness , as well as in the Europeanness. We did not have time to get used to them. This resulted in a period of indifferent pragmatism. It is good, that lately it is gradually changing into its patriotic form; we are beginning to think seriously about our sovereignty.

T_P/BR: To what extent was Belarus known and recognizable on the international arena in the very beginning of its independence? What efforts were undertaken to improve the knowledge of the newly established country in the world?

AM: In the beginning of our independence we were little-known and little-recognizable. Belarusians were often confused with Russian White Guards; foreigners often did not know whether our country was located west of the Urals or beyond the Urals. First efforts to improve the situation were undertaken by The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, headed by Piatro Kraŭčanka. Now the Ministry of Culture, headed by Paval Latuška has joined these efforts. Finally, Belarusian cultural centers abroad are being established. However, this is not enough. We should more actively take advantage of our compatriots, Belarusists living abroad.

T_P/BR: How do Belarusians differ from their neighbors in their attitude toward their own culture and language? What has caused this difference?

AM: We differ in this matter from our neighbors, because they had time to develop as nations and did not have to cope with our confessional and ethnic division into "Russian Orthodox" and "Polish Catholics."

T_P/BR: In your own judgment, is the Belarusian national project fully completed?

AM: I do not think it has been completed, since historically it could not take place. Belarus used to be considered a "Cinderella" between Poland and Russia. However, I do believe that it will still take place, with the appearance of a "prince" in the form of a cultural/ethnic synthesis.

The interview was conducted by ***Hanna Vasilevič***

NEWS BRIEFS

July 5, 2012

Teddy Bear Airdrop over Belarus

Residents of a small town outside the Belarusian capital and the Swedish man who says he flew the plane in question have confirmed reports of a bizarre stunt to promote free speech by illegally entering Belarusian airspace and dropping teddy bears from an airplane. Belarusian authorities deny any such incursion happened. Officials in neighboring Lithuania have acknowledged a violation of their airspace on July 4 and are investigating whether an aircraft used their territory en route to such an airdrop.

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

July 5, 2012

Swedish Media confirm the Airdrop

On July 4, the Swedish media published a video of a single-engine airplane with two passengers on board crossing Belarusí border from the territory of Lithuania and dropping teddy-bears with texts in support of freedom of speech in Belarus over the town of Ivyanets. Later on, local citizens presented evidence of the incident.

Source: Solidarity with Belarus Information Office

July 19, 2012

Agreement on Nuclear Power Plant Construction

President Alyaksandr Lukashenka and visiting Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev have signed a general agreement on construction of a nuclear power station in Belarus.

The project, in the northwestern town of Astravets near the Lithuanian border, should be built according to Russian construction plans using a $10 billion loan from Moscow.

There have been plans to build a nuclear plant in Belarus since the 1980s, during Soviet times, but the project was derailed in the aftermath of the 1986 Chornobyl disaster in neighboring Ukraine.

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

July 19, 2012

Official Reactions to Teddy-Bear Caper

Journalism Student Facing Charges

Thousands of people post pictures of teddy bears on the Internet daily, yet only one has found himself locked away in a Belarusian KGB prison for doing so. The authorities in Minsk on July 17 extended for 10 days the detention of photographer Anton Surapin, a 20-year-old student at Belarus State University's journalism school, for posting online photographs of stuffed teddy bears that a Swedish public-relations firm says it dropped in Belarus from a plane on July 4. Surapin was detained on July 13. He likely faces charges of "helping foreigners illegally enter Belarus." Presumably the charge refers not to the bears, but to the Swedes who say they dropped the toys from a private plane that illegally entered Belarusian airspace in order to protest restrictions of free speech under the government of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka. He could be sentenced to seven years in prison if convicted. (He was eventually released).

Realtor Detained for Accommodating a Swedish Participant

The independent website "Belaruski Partizan" and the human rights website charter97.org reported on July 17 that a man identified as Syarhey Bashamirau has already been in detention for 11 days. He allegedly rented an apartment to at least one Swedish participant in the stunt and is charged with aiding "an organized group" in illegally crossing the Belarusian state line. No further information about that case was immediately available. The government of Belarus has denied that the teddy-bear incident ever happened, saying that the video released by the Swedes had been faked and that the whole thing was a "provocation." Official media in the country have not reported on the criminal cases connected with the "nonincident".

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

July 19, 2012

Amnesty International Concerned Over New Probe Of Jailed Belarus Activist

Amnesty International is expressing concern over the new probe launched by Belarusian authorities of the jailed leader of the unregistered Young Front opposition organization, Zmitser Dashkevich. The human rights watchdog already recognizes Dashkevich as a "prisoner of conscience," jailed for his political views. Belarus authorities said on July 18 that investigations had been launched into Dashkevich's alleged "systematic and aggressive refusal to follow instructions of the penitentiary administration." If convicted, Dashkevich could receive another year in jail. In a statement on July 19, Amnesty International urged Belarus authorities to "stop the harassment" of Dashkevich. Dashkevich was sentenced to two years in jail after being found guilty in March, 2011, of assaulting two people in Minsk in December 2010, one day before Belarus' disputed presidential election that resulted in the mass arrests of activists.

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

July 25, 2012

Belarus Leader Denied Accreditation to Attend London Olympics

Belarus President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has been denied accreditation by London Olympics organizers to attend the 2012 games, which officially begin in the British capital on July 27.

The announcement was made through Twitter by State Duma Deputy Speaker and Russian National Olympic Committee head Aleksandr Zhukov.

Lukashenka, along with more than 200 other Belarusian officials, are banned from entering European Union member states such as Britain because of human rights abuses and democratic shortcomings in Lukashenkaís regime.

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

July 27, 2012

Vasil Bykau museum to open in Belarus

Work is underway to establish a museum dedicated to People's Writer of Belarus Vasil Bykau. The museum will

be opened in Vasil Bykau's summer house in the village of Ždanovičy, Minsk District, BelTA learnt from the Culture Ministry of Belarus.

With this in mind, on 27 July 2012 the government of Belarus passed a resolution stipulating that Iryna Bykava hands over the summer house to the state free of charge. "This day marks the start of work to perpetuate the memory of the writer and preserve his creative heritage," the Culture Ministry underscored.

The museum will be opened as a branch of the Belarusian Literature History Museum. In 2012-2014 the summer house of Vasil Bykau will be renovated and turned into a museum establishment.

The staff of the Belarusian Literature History Museum is processing Vasil Bykau's archives and keeping record of his personal effects that will make the core of the exposition of the future museum in 2013-2014.

The exposition will tell the visitors about the main stages of the writer's life and creative work, his relationships with friends, relatives and fellow men of letters. The idea of the museum aims to show Vasil Bykau's contribution to the Belarusian and world literature.

The Vasil Bykau museum is set to be opened in June 2014. The event will be timed to the 90th anniversary of his birthday.

Source: *BelTA*

August 3, 2012

Belarusian Authorities Expel the Swedish Ambassador

In its turn, Sweden sent out two Belarus diplomats. Carl Bildt, the Foreign Minister of Sweden, has said on his Twitter that "Lukashenka regime has expelled Swedish Ambassador to Belarus for being too supportive of human rights. Outrageous. Shows nature of regime." Several minutes later, Mr. Bildt noted: "We have said that the new Belarus ambassador to Sweden is not welcome and have asked two other diplomats to leave." In his official statement, Carl Bildt says sending out Stefan Ericsson is a rude violation of norms of relations between two states. He calls the accusations against the ambassador groundless and mentions that Sweden has never concealed supporting democracy and human rights in Belarus. In its turn, Sweden informed Belarusian ambassador that the presence of its new ambassador to Sweden is not welcomed, and two Belarus embassy representatives are going to be sent out, as well. Belarusian Foreign Ministry stated that "Belarus did not expel the Swedish ambassador. .A decision was taken of not extending his accreditation. Stefan Ericsson has been in Belarus for 7 years, and all this time his work was aimed not at establishing, but at ruining bilateral relations. The decision is a part of our bilateral relations. If the Swedish party intends to aggravate the situation, we will have to react in an appropriate way, stated Foreign Ministry press service.

Stefan Ericsson has been working in Minsk since 2005. He is one of the best European experts on Belarus. He has actively supported Belarusian culture: he personally translated some of works by Vasil Bykau and Uladzimier Arlou into Swedish and helped to bring Belarusian rock bands to Swedish stages. Swedish policy towards Belarus has been aimed at the support of democracy and human rights. Sweden supports the only Belarusian-language TV channel Belsat and European Humanities University, an independent Belarusian university which is currently in exile in Vilnius. Swedish singer Loreen, the winner of Eurovision Song Contest 2012, performed at the Belarusian state arts festival Slavianski Bazar and — to a big displeasure of officials — met with the imprisoned human rights defender Alies Bialiacki's wife. The meeting took place at the Swedish embassy in Minsk. The final event that probably broke the camel's back, was the teddy-bear bombing performed by two civilian Swedish pilots who entered Belarusian air space unnoticed and dropped teddy bears with pro-democracy slogans over Minsk. .

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty



Ambassador Stefan Ericsson

August 8, 2012

Belarus recalls embassy staff from Sweden

Belarus would withdraw its embassy staff from Sweden in response to the Scandinavian country's expulsion of Belarusian diplomats, the Foreign Ministry said in a statement Wednesday.

"The Swedish Foreign Ministry has chosen to aggravate relations between the two countries and made a decision to expel two senior diplomats from the Belarusian embassy, ...and to refuse the entry of a new Belarusian ambassador to Sweden," the statement said.

Thus, the Belarusian embassy staff in Stockholm would be reduced to two diplomats too junior to run the mission, it said.

"According to these facts, Belarus had to make a decision to recall its embassy staff from Sweden. Steps toward this are already being made," the ministry said.

It said the bilateral cooperation and direct diplomatic presence in the two countries were possible only if the Swedish side abided by the internationally recognized principles of mutual respect and equality.

Source: *Xinhua*

August 9, 2012

Memorial events for Kolas, Kupala go far beyond Belarus

Events to mark the 130th anniversary of the birthdays of Jakub Kolas and Janka Kupala have gone far beyond Belarus, Deputy Culture Minister Tadevuš Stružecki said welcoming the participants in the international roundtable meeting "Topical problems of memorial museums. Traditions and innovations in their development and activities" hosted by the Jakub Kolas Literary-Memorial Museum.

"This year Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania, Estonia joined the celebrations of the anniversaries of the Belarusian classics. It is very important for us and for the ethnic Belarusians living in these countries because these two Belarusian poets can be rightly considered as classics of world literature," Tadevuš Stružecki said.

According to Tadevuš Stružecki, the development of museology in Belarus is one of the most important priorities

of the state policy in culture. Belarus has a well-developed network of museums, both public and private. Their number is gradually growing. This year's new comers are the Museum of Belarusian Statehood, and the national historical and cultural museum-reserve Niasviž. The first phase of a new exhibition at the Jakub Kolas Literary-Memorial Museum has been officially inaugurated this year as well. It is notable for the use of 3D interactive multimedia technologies. More new expositions are scheduled for next year.

In general, the year 2012 can be informally considered as the year of museums in Belarus, underscored Tadevuš Stružecki. He recalled that the first national forum titled as Museums of Belarus will be held in October, within the framework of the state culture program of Belarus for 2011-2015. It aims to support the development of museology in the country, to stimulate creative initiatives, encourage dedicated museum specialists who have contributed to the study, preservation and promotion of cultural values, and to raise public awareness of the multifaceted activities of museums.

The international roundtable "Topical problems of memorial museums. Traditions and innovations in their development and activities" is attended by directors of literary museums from Russia, Lithuania, Ukraine and Belarus. On 10 August, the roundtable participants are set to visit Mikalajeŭščyna, the branch of the Jakub Kolas Literary-Memorial Museum, to attend the festive events dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the first meeting between the national poets Janka Kupala and Jakub Kolas. On 10 August the Memorial Estate Smolna will hold a ceremony to open the memorial plaque in honor of the 100th anniversary of the meeting of the two poets.

Source: *BelTA*

August 20, 2012

Lukashenka Replaces Foreign Minister

Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has dismissed Foreign Minister Syarhey Martynau and replaced him with Uladzimer Makei, the head of the presidential administration.

Martynau had been Belarus's foreign minister since March 2003.

The presidential office said that Martynau was dismissed in connection with his transfer to another position.

No further details were immediately available.

Within hours of the news, the European Union noted in a statement that Makei was on its list of Belarusian individuals subject to EU sanctions.

The EU has imposed travel bans and asset freezes on Lukashenka and other senior Belarusian officials over the regime's crackdown on the opposition and civil society

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

August 22, 2012

Belarus to further boost cooperation with China

Belarusian President Aliaksandr Lukashenka said here on Wednesday that the country would continue to boost cooperation with China, with a focus on substantial results.

Belarus has adopted a right policy to build a strategic partnership with China, and now it's necessary to further promote Belarus-China cooperation in all areas for substantial results, said Lukashenka while introducing the country's new Foreign Minister Uladzimir Makei.

The president asked the minister to step up efforts in cementing ties with China, citing the establishment of a Belarusian-Chinese Industrial Park as an important opportunity that must not be missed.

Since the two countries established diplomatic relations 20 years ago, China has become Belarus' fourth largest trading partner in the world.

The European Union has expressed its willingness to work with Makei, despite the fact that the new minister is on the "blacklist" of the regional bloc.

Source: *Xinhua*

August 22, 2012

Top Opposition Candidate Denied Registration

Election officials in Belarus have refused to register a leading opposition politician as a candidate in the September 23 parliamentary elections.

A district election commission said Alyaksandr Milinkevich was denied registration because too many of the signatures he gathered from supporters were invalid.

Election officials also declared that Milinkevich -- leader of the opposition Movement for Freedom -- did not provide correct information about his income or the property he owns.

Milinkevich told the French news agency AFP that the ruling "is a political decision" and that he will appeal.

Source: . Charter97 Press Center

August 29, 2012

Parliamentary candidates sign a petition in support of Źmicier Daškievič

114 parliamentary candidates — with prominent politicians and civil society activists among them — have signed the petition calling for the release of Źmicier Daškievič and other political prisoners.



"The persecution of Mr. Daškievič is clearly politically motivated, and contradicts the international obligations of Belarus, in particular, not to engage in "cruel and inhuman treatment and punishment," the petition says.

The appeal was signed on the day when the sentence to Źmicier Daškievič takes effect.

Źmicier Daškievič, Chairman of opposition organization Young Front was tried again on August 28.

He was charged with persistent violations of the rules of the penitentiary institution (article 411).

Source: *Naša Niva*

August 29, 2012

Belarus' security forces accompanied German police as observers during an anti-nuclear demonstration in Germany in 2010.

As the press secretary for Germany interior ministry told German Bild am Sonttag, the German police forces participated in training of Belarusian police not until 2011 as reported previously, but until spring, 2012. The representative

of German customs police responsible for the training was staying in Belarus until this time, RFE\RL says.

Earlier, German mass media informed that law enforcement agencies of Germany had trained Belarusian police officers between 2008 and 2011. In particular, around 100 Belarusian law enforcement agencies employees were reported to participate in trainings in Germany.

Belarusians witnessed the dissolution of anti-nuclear demonstrations in Germany where batons, water cannons and tear gas was used. Furthermore, German police officers trained around 400 Belarusian customs officers, police administration representatives and criminalists in Belarus.

Bundestag now is requiring the explanations from the Interior Ministry, speaker for Social-Democrats fraction Michael Hartmann said.

According to Mr. Hartmann, Bundestag had been unaware of cooperation between German and Belarusian police all this time.

The first to alarm about such cooperation was German leftists led by Gregor Gysi. This year, he addressed the Federal Government asking to find out if the cooperation between German and Belarusian was somehow linked to the police brutality on December 19, 2010.

Source: *Naša Niva*

September 5, 2012
Belarus refuses to extradite brother of former Kyrgyz president

The Belarusian Prosecutor General's Office Wednesday declined the request made by Kyrgyz prosecutors to extradite Zhanybek Bakiyev, the brother of Kyrgyzstan's former president Kurmanbek Bakiyev.

"Taking into account the events in Kyrgyzstan and the nature of charges laid against Bakiyev, the Belarusian side believes that the extradition request was filed due to persecution for political beliefs and was thus rejected," said a spokesman with the Prosecutor General's Office.

Belarusian authority had considered the Kyrgyz prosecutors' request for the extradition of Zhanybek Bakiyev back in June, said the office.

According to the statement, Kyrgyzstan should adopt a more sensible position on the situation with the Bakiyev family. Otherwise it will be difficult for Bishkek to prove its constructive and partner-like ambitions on the country's path to the Customs Union.

Kyrgyzstan has repeatedly asked Belarus to extradite a brother of the republic's ousted president Kurmanbek Bakiyev, who has been put on the Interpol wanted list on charges of triple murder.

Kyrgyzstan recalled its ambassador to Belarus after images of Zhanybek Bakiyev and his two assistants near a restaurant in Minsk appeared on the internet.

Source: *Xinhua*

September 14, 2012
Belarus to import 23bn cubic meters of natural gas in 2013

Next year Belarus plans to import 23 billion cubic meters of natural gas and increase its transit, Belarusian Premier Mikhail Myasnikovich told a press conference on 14 September.

.The meetings the Belarusian government held with the Gazprom executives not long ago opened up brand-new prospects for Belarus including in transit, the Premier said.

According to Mikhail Myasnikovich, gas transit via Belarus presents the most advantageous logistics. "We plan large-scale projects in the use of natural gas as motor fuel. We also discussed the issues related to underground gas storage facilities in Belarus, real estate, social projects, and measures to ensure Beltransgaz stable operation," Mikhail Myasnikovich added.

"We are making headway, and we are grateful to Russia for this constructive approach. All those concerns about the sale of Beltransgaz were groundless. We pump more gas today than we did in 2010 and 2011. The economy is efficient, and we have good projects in the future. This is a good example of close integration. The main thing is to have trust-based partner relations," Mikhail Myasnikovich said.

Source: *BelTA*

September 19, 2012
Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Russia will continue to support Belarus

On September 19th Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus Uladzimir Makei visited Russia and met with Foreign Minister of Russia Sergey Lavrov. "The parties reassured their readiness to provide mutual support to each other in the international organizations while discussing the entire range of issues of the agenda for the purposes of defending the interests of Russia and Belarus on the international arena," as the Foreign Ministry informs.

As Telegraf reported, on September 17th Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus Uladzimir Makei met with U.S. Charge d'Affaires Ethan Goldrich. During this meeting the parties have discussed the key issues of the Belarusian-American relations, as the press service of Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs informs.

Source: *Telegraf.by*

THOUGHTS & OBSERVATIONS

Swedish Ambassador's Departure From Belarus

By David Marples

On August 3, Belarusian television stations explained why the Belarusian authorities have refused to extend the accreditation of Swedish Ambassador Stefan Eriksson. On the program Panarama, Syarhey Husachenka stated first that it was a routine matter, and the Swedish ambassador had already spent a long time in Belarus (he arrived in 2005), but then claimed that Eriksson had tried to do harm to Belarus, had engaged in subversive activity, and had given instructions and money to opposition groups seeking to carry out a coup on the eve of the 2010 presidential elections (Charter97.org, August 4). Two other Swedish diplomats were reportedly also asked to leave Minsk (RT, August 3).

Understandably, Sweden has responded with anger. Foreign Minister Carl Bildt maintained that the regime of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka "has seriously violat-

ed the standards of international relations" (Belorusskiy Partizan, August 4). Sweden would expel two Belarusian diplomats and the new Belarusian ambassador "would not be welcome" in Sweden (UKPA, August 3). In a letter to Radio Svaboda, Ambassador Eriksson wrote that he loved his job and had tried to carry out his duties honestly (Nasha Niva, August 5).

The expulsion of Eriksson comes a month after a Swedish public relations firm, Studio Total, which specializes in revolutionary advertisements, dispatched a small plane from Lithuania that dropped 789 teddy bears into the town of Ivyanets, in the Valozhyn district of Minsk Voblast. The stunt, designed to focus more attention on press freedom and civil violations in Belarus, has led to the dismissals of Major-General Ihar Rachkouski, Chairman of the State Border Committee, and Dzmitry Pahmelkin, Commander of the Air Force and the Air Defense Troops of the Belarusian Armed Forces, and reprimands for incompetence to Defense Minister Lieutenant-General Yuri Zhadobin, First Deputy Minister Piotr Tikhonouski, State Secretary of Security Leanid Maltsev, and Chairman of State Security (KGB) Vadim Zaitseu (president.gov.by, July 31).

Although there was no immediate official reaction to the penetration of Belarusian air space, the incident was publicized over the Internet by 20-year old photojournalist Anton Suryapin, who was arrested on July 13 and remains in prison without being formally charged. He faces a potential prison sentence of seven years for his role in "assisting" an illegal border crossing (Committee to Protect Journalists, July 18). Founder of Studio Total, Per Cromwell, has confirmed that neither Suryapin nor Ambassador Eriksson had been alerted beforehand to the plan (news@telocal.se, July 19; RIA Novosti, August 3).

The question is why did the Belarusian President, a man noted for his skill in diplomatic maneuvers against his perceived enemies, react with such fury to the publicity stunt? Why was it necessary to arrest an innocent blogger and remove the Swedish ambassador? As former chairman of the parliament Stanislau Shushkevich remarked, even the USSR had taken no such actions after the 1987 incident when 19-year old German pilot Matthias Rust landed his Cessna in Red Square (Narodnaya Volya, August 4). There are several likely reasons.

First, the stunt was a major embarrassment to the Belarusian authorities. The Lukashenka regime has made much publicity over the guarding of its borders, especially on occasions commemorating the "Great Patriotic War." The President insisted that his prime concern was the safety of citizens and maintained that the plane had been detected immediately, but asked: "Why was it not stopped?" He may have also been provoked by the open and unedited letter addressed to him by Cromwell, which included the statement: "On the internet, you are regarded as a clown" and that in preparing the mission, it was easy to ascertain the necessary information about Belarusian air defense on Wikipedia, and that the description was invariably the same in all places: "a brutal, but severely malfunctioning mechanism, best suited for parades and for harassing civilians" (news@telocal.se, July 19).

Under the mantle of the CSTO, Belarus is currently installing a joint air defense system with Russia and Kazakhstan that is intended to be in place by 2013. According to a Russian source, it will receive an S-300 system intended originally for Iran. In early July, Russian Deputy Air Force Commander Pavel Kurachko commented that Russia and Belarus had ratified the agreement and were discussing troops' command personnel (RT, July 11; Pravda.ru, July 12). Obviously it is not yet in operation and Belarus has suffered a psychological setback.

Second, embarrassing the Belarusian leadership may have been a goal of the mission, but another consequence of it may have been accidental. More likely, the aim was to drop the teddy bears in Minsk, 40 miles further east of where they landed. Ivanyets (Iwaniec), together with the surrounding villages, is one of the few towns in Belarus with a predominantly ethnic Polish population. In February 2010, it was the site of an "unauthorized" meeting of the independent Union of Poles, which was interrupted by intruding militia, who subsequently seized the Polish House (see EDM, February 19, 2010). The teddy bear drop thus may have reignited an issue that has been relatively dormant since the official crackdown and establishment of an alternative Union of Poles more amenable to the authorities.

Third, Lukashenka takes pride in safeguarding the borders as a former border guard himself. His two elder sons, Viktor and Dzmitry, have also served in this position. While appointing Rachkouski's successor, Alyaksandr Baechka, Lukashenka lamented that border guards had been preoccupied with political issues rather than the fundamental matter of guarding the border, and that the State Border Committee was responsible for this change in priorities (BELTA, August 2). Over a year ago, Rachkouski was advocating a visa-free regime with the European Union and ways to prevent long lines at border crossings (BELTA, April 7, 2011).

Lastly, the decision to curtail the accreditation of Ambassador Eriksson may only be partially related to the teddy bear drop. More likely, it proved expedient to use the incident as a means to remove a figure who was very much at home in Belarus, spoke Belarusian fluently and had emerged as a major public figure. The Swedish Embassy in Minsk has been open less than four years and one of its stated missions was to increase contacts with Belarusian society as well as with the authorities (http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/10165/a/107131).

Sweden was the prime initiator, along with Poland, of Belarusian participation in the Eastern Partnership Project in 2008.

The accusations of Eriksson being a spy, as Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt has stated (UKPA, August 3), are ridiculous. And the official response to the teddy bear drop is, by any standards, an overreaction. But the response is a sign not only of the Belarusian President's discomfiture, but also of the regime's weakness and insecurity rather than a signal that a new round of repressions is about to begin.

Source: Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor,

Quotes of Quarter

"Lukashenka's regime expelled the Ambassador of Sweden to Belarus for being too supportive of human rights. Outrageous. Shows the nature of the regime",

wrote the Swedish Foreign Minister **CARL BILDT** on August 3 in his blog.

Lukashenka Needs a Soldier, Not a Diplomat

By Pavel Usov, ***Belarusian Center for European Studies***

Aliaksandr Lukashenka's decision to appoint Uladzimir Makei Minister of Foreign Affairs marks a change in Minsk's general foreign policy strategy in the international arena, particularly regarding the West. Despite Makei's diplomatic education and experience, he is first and foremost an administrator and a reliable executor of Lukashenka's orders, a personality that triggered expansion of administrative and political control in Belarus. There is nothing special about it; otherwise he could not have survived in the "political Olympus" of Belarus. Hence, Makei's appointment to the post of foreign minister will rather indicate an intensification of Belarus' confrontation with the EU and the West in general. By Makei's appointment Lukashenka showed that he does not intend to meet Western demands by means of political and diplomatic concessions. Belarusian authorities will continue pursuing tough policies both within the country and in diplomatic relations with the West.

The fact that a person who is on the EU entry ban list is nevertheless appointed to the foreign minister post also emphasizes the inflexibility of Belarusian diplomatic strategy. Belarus' political relations with the European Union will most likely stop being a priority for the Belarusian regime and will boil down to economic relations. Minsk thus strengthens its isolation in the Western direction, but wants to shift the guilt for that on the West. If Makei as a foreign minister remains banned from entering the EU (which probably will be the case), Belarusian propaganda will accuse the West of isolating Belarus. However, the question of "who is guilty" of isolating Belarus is not a key aspect in this case.

One thing is obvious – Minsk does not wish to break the diplomatic deadlock in its relations with the West on the conditions of the EU and the US. A soldier — not a diplomat is needed to pursue confrontation policies, and it is precisely Uladzimir Makei who fits this role. Lukashenka also wishes to show that the resumption of a dialogue is not a fundamental issue for him. Should Lukashenka strive to alleviate the current crisis situation, he would probably appoint a diplomat as a minister, for instance the current press secretary of the Belarusian Foreign Ministry Andrei Savinykh, or Pavel Latushka, who for quite a long time had served as ambassador to Poland and also worked as press secretary of the Foreign Ministry.

Another factor determining the future development of Belarus' domestic and foreign policies, is the new head of the country's presidential administration. It is likely that this post will be occupied by Aliaksandr Radzkoŭ. In this case, one may expect a deterioration of the general political situation in the country, and consequently, a deepening crisis in relations with the West. In its turn, this will direct Belarus' foreign policy primarily toward the third world countries, China and Russia. Along with that, we may expect deepening of integration processes within the Eurasian Economic Union.

On Indetermination of Geopolitical Choice

David Erkomaishvili

Recent IISEPS poll results have become the bottom line for the editorial by Kirył Kaścian published in *Belarus Review*'s Summer issue. According to the poll, 47% of respondents in mid-2011 would have preferred Belarus' integration with the EU as their main foreign policy choice, while only 31% of those questioned favoured integration with Russia. However, the most fascinating change appears if the last year results are compared to this year's where 47% of questioned people incline towards integration with Russia outnumbering those 37% whose choice retain the EU.

More importantly though, Mr Kaścian set down thoughts on the tricky manner questions were addressed in that poll. Posing questions while leaving literally no room for any alternative options other than "either-or" choice reflects the principal flimsiness of many polls and geopolitical analyses on the post-Soviet space, be it journalist or academic inquiry. Irrespective of the origins of such analyses, most of them tend to operate with a Cold War style mind-sets.

If You Are Not With Us You Are Against Us

Back in 2001, precisely after the September 11 terrorist attacks, George W. Bush declared that there was no room for neutrality in the War on Terror. "You are either with us or against us" was his verdict. That famously stepped up coalition formation for retaliation strike on Al Qaeda in Afghanistan which later resulted in a multinational ISAF mission on the ground.

Extending similar approach to geopolitical analyses seems to be archaic. The poll Mr Kaścian refers to offered two main answer options – integration with EU or with Russia. To be sure, Belarus in this case not merely integrated with Russia but that integration tend to grow over time within the Customs Union. Nevertheless, many scholars usually operate with one particular narrative which asserts that there are two options when it comes to foreign policy choices of post-Soviet states: it is either EU (by extension US, or the West) or Russia. Advocates of this approach lean to omit the fact that partnering with other post-Soviet space states may offer an alternative, not to mention looking in the direction of China, Turkey, Iran and other powers may be another possible choice. Such mode of analysis leaves out of scope third option.

Engaging All

Ian Bremmer's G-zero concept perhaps best reflects the problem many post-Soviet nations, including Belarus, face today: in this day and age taking sides may simply be costly. Scholars tend to borrow from Cold War approaches and apply them to the analysis of current events. But let's face the reality, that simply doesn't work that way anymore. In a G-zero world the winning side is that which is not against some or other parties but engage them all.

In this respect Mr Kaścian's proposition offers the third scenario – neutrality for Belarus. This exact third scenario is mostly absent from discourse on post-Soviet space. One particular feature with Belarus, which pushes scholars to treat it as "either-or" case is its geopolitics. Sandwiched between powerful global actors such as Russia and EU, foreign policy choices naturally tend to be limited to the two main scenarios – bridge or ally. However, there is one more approach exist and it is very popular among post-Soviet decision makers.

Let's establish a fact, in the post-Soviet space such approach is referred to as 'multivector' foreign policy. Lukashenka's presidency has been perhaps the best example of it until his foreign policy choices were cut by a number of his administration mistakes and forced him to conform to those two options mentioned above.

Alliance Choices

The third scenario, however, is not a 'multivector' solution which is rather a hectic rush for competing benefits. Be it neutrality or non-alignment, the third scenario which has been visibly absent in the poll and in political reality is a must. It has a significant potential of expanding Belarus' freedom of political action in the post-Soviet space and beyond.

Mr Kaścian refers to Belarus taking political neutrality, since military neutrality could be extremely costly. Switzerland which has one of the highest military expenditures in the world is a good case in point. To reduce the negative consequences of its geopolitical location Belarus needs an 'engaging all' approach. But there is another point to this scenario. Firstly, neutrality has to be accepted by the key regional players which will inevitably include Russia and EU. At this point, Russia which sees Belarus as a buffer state and considers it to be of a critical security importance to its national security, may not agree. Secondly, neutrality is not a simple unilateral step and, thus, it has to be guaranteed by key players and respected. And thirdly, it should be legally assured on the international level.

From a geopolitical perspective Belarus is very vulnerable. All major wars between Russia and Europe inevitably involved Belarus' territory. This suggests that to provide for its security Minsk has to capitalise on its vulnerable geopolitical conditions. How this can be achieved? By recognising the importance of its location and engaging all parties with a flexible approach. So far Belarus' only real choice has been Russia which is nothing unusual. But from an alliance theory perspective, alignment with Russia is not balancing. Lukashenka's administration has not been balancing Russia against EU and vice versa. Alliance theory posits, when security threats are minimal – EU does not threaten Belarus, and there are no hostile regimes in proximity – alliance participation may well just be an attempt to buy legitimacy.

Scholars need to break with the thinking which is fixed on "either-or" approach and introduce diverse options to choose from. Perhaps such choice will not only provide immunity from sensitive geopolitical conditions but also help enrich domestic political arena

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Uladzimir Baradač: In Belarus there Exists Enormous Potential for Protest

The recent events in Belarus and its surrounding area result in many varied, often contradictory assessments. In his interview with ***Belarusian Review,*** *Uladzimir Baradač, chairman of the organizing committee of the "Council of National Rebirth" describes his view on the current situation in Belarus and further development of events in the country.*

Belarusian Review: *How do you evaluate the current political balance in Belarus:*

Uladzimir Baradač: There exists in the country an enormous potential for protest in all sectors of society. About 70% of the population is asking for change. Over 50% of the active populace is ready to emigrate from the country, whenever possible. However, activeness of these masses is very low. First , this is because in Belarus not a single political party enjoys respect among both simple people and nomenklatura employees. Second, current leaders are not capable of overcoming their own interests in order to achieve common objectives; also they are directed by the authorities. They practically serve the regime. The leaders have discredited themselves in the eyes of both citizens and rank-and-file members of their parties. One has to admit though, that this is not result of the opposition's poor activity, but rather of efficient work by special services. "In order to destroy an organization, one has to take over its leadership." This task has been performed successfully. The country has not a single registered political party (except the Conservative Christian Party) ,whose leadership is not controlled by special services. The popularity rating of even the best-known politicians remains low : Niakliajeŭ — 6%, Sańnikaŭ — 5%. They are demoralized and have assumed a holding pattern, unpopular with citizens. In addition, their milieu has completely discredited itself after the presidential campaign. Lukašenka finds the opposition in its present form necessary.

Further, a new organization is gaining respect. It is the ad-hoc committee of the "Council of National Rebirth," whose ideas are supported by 9,4% of population. People understand that the system may be defeated only by a systemic force. A reorganization of the opposition is necessary; without it it has no chance of participating in

societal processes in Belarus. There is a need to create a systemic structured organization, not controlled by the KGB. The BNR Rada could play a certain role in this. We have been waiting long for its reply. All conditions for this exist.

BR: *Is it worthwhile to expect changes resulting from this fall's parliamentary elections?*

UB: Lukašenka's regime won't agree to even cosmetic changes of its foundations, including changes in parliament's composition. It may appoint there candidates from political parties, directed by special services; this will make visible the seeming democratization of the regime and produce a reason for all kinds of propaganda. If Lukašenka does not undertake this step, he will only harm himself because these politicians could become his advocates in Europe, lobbying for his interests. The West which has been financing these regime "oppositionists" over all these years, will pay attention to them.

As far as the pocket parliament is concerned, it, and essentially all institutions subordinated to authorities, will not perform its functions. Lukašenka's will will prevail here. The parliamentary elections have only confirmed the ineffectiveness. of our opposition. By this measure, as well as in presidential elections, special services have not allowed the opposition to create a unified program and position. In voters' eyes, the confused positions of the UCP, "Tell the Truth," and the movement "For freedom" resemble double-dealing. Only Kaliakin's "Just World" and supporters of boycott have assumed defined positions. This indicates that the opposition will behave in an even more ridiculous fashion in the 2015 presidential elections. In order to please Lukašenka, it is consciously asleep. These players secure voters' participation for the dictator , facilitating falsification of elections. Neither the dictator, nor this opposition is about to change, since they are in the same boat.

BR: *In light of the recent Belarusian-Swedish diplomatic conflict, how would you assess recent changes at the highest level of Belarus' authorities?*

UB: The dictator has incorrectly evaluated the "free-of-charge inspection" of his borders by the Swedish crew and the preparedness of his anti-aircraft defense system. Instead of being grateful for the discovered deficiencies and the real possibility of drones penetrating his territory, the panic-stricken Lukašenka began making organizational decisions, such as dismissing the secondary person Pachmielkin, or Račkoŭski, as incompetent in his profession. Yet people from the president's personal family team, such as Defense Minister Zadobin, or KGB chairman Zajcaŭ, were not punished for this incident, as well as for the 2008 and 2011 explosions in Minsk, . The reason behind transferring Makiej - the former head of the President's administration to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was the strengthening of the positions and influence of this person in Lukašenka's nomenklatura circles. He persevered. It is time for change; competent and influential personalities are always dangerous in the midst of fools. Thus the educated Makiej has been sent to the "sophisticated " Westerners — to exchange dictatorial values for Europe's economic preferences. However, even Daltonians cannot be persuaded that black is white.

MEDIA WATCH

Belarus in the Foreign Media

Our readership knows the section "Newsbriefs" which summarizes main Belarus-related news during the three-month period covered by each printed issue of *Belarusian Review*. We are proud to introduce a new section of newsbriefs entitled "Belarus in the Foreign media" which depicts the coverage of Belarus-related issues in national media of different countries. In this issue we start with media coverage of Belarus in Latvia and Spain in Summer 2012.

Latvia

By Solvita Denisa-Liepniece

Traditionally in the Latvian media Belarus attracts less attention than, for example, the neighboring Russian Federation. The news topics which brought Belarus into the pages of Latvian media are sport (especially ice-hockey), politics ("teddy-bear attack", plush toys toys which bore messages urging Belarus to respect human rights were dropped from a Swedish plane over Belarusian territory), economy and culture (topics are placed in the descending order).

With the keywords "Belarus", "Minsk" and "Lukashenka", several dozen of titles dated by Summer 2012 can be sorted out from the Latvian-language press (newspapers *Neatkarīga rīta avīze*, *Diena*, *Latvijas avīze*). In these titles Belarus is just mentioned in various contexts. In the cases of nearly three dozen articles, Belarus itself, developments in Belarus, or Belarus-related events were the main topics of the publication.

It can be concluded that Latvian newspapers do not have permanent correspondents in Belarus. The major sources for information about Belarus are primarily news agencies (Reuters is the leader in quoting) and other media; interviews or social networks are used less often. Two titles resulted from the correspondents' visits to Belarus: *Latvijas Avīze* published an article "Citādā Baltkrievija" (*Another Belarus*) by Ilze Rutenberga-Berziņa; while *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze Latvijai* issued a text "Minska pēc krīzes" (*Minsk after crisis*) by Juris Paiders. Both the articles can be defined as "positive". On the basis of his observations in Minsk, Juris Paiders depicts how Belarus has overcome economic crisis. Ilze Rutenberga-Berziņa describes Brest and the Bielavieža Forest as a tourist destination, the author notes cleanliness and order, as well as the natural beauty of the region.

The main reason for political topics constitute a description of the "teddy-bear" attack performed by Swedish activists who called for human rights respect in Belarus, personnel appointments and diplomatic relations. It is noteworthy that Vladimir Putin's visit in Belarus on his first foreign trip since being inaugurated Russia's president became the reason for the appearance of Belarus issues in the Latvian media.

An article in *Diena* "Lukašenko gatavo nākamo diktatoru" (*Lukashenka prepares a new dictator*) is dedicated to Aliaksandr Lukashenka's son – Mikalai. This article

describes a joint public appearances and visits of the Belarusian president and his illegitimate son. One can also note that *Diena* exploits words like "dictatorship", "authoritarian leader" and contains more commentaries different from the news gentre.

Main cultural event of the summer, which brought Belarus into the pages of Latvian press is Samanta Tina's performance at the contest of young singers during the "Slavianski Bazaar" Festival. A singer from Latvia won the first prize, finishing second just behind the Grand Prix winner from Macedonia. It is noteworthy that the interest in the contest emerged only post factum, after it became known that a Latvian representative had been awarded.

Spain

by Ángela Espinosa Ruiz,

winner of "Belarus in Focus" contest for citizen journalists

Traditionally Spanish media do not give much attention to the Belarus-related news. In summer 2012 the Spanish TV or newspapers covered only a few topics related to Belarus.

The media reported on Andrzej Poczobut's, a correspondent of a prominent Polish newspaper Gazeta Wyborcza and Polish-Belarusian political activist, arrest and release on probation as well as on the OSCE condemnation of the journalist's detention. (*Telecinco TV*, newspapers *El País* and *La Razón*).

A "teddy-bear attack" on Belarus made by the employees of the Swedish advertisement agency *Studio Total* and its outcomes, the subsequent diplomatic crisis between Minsk and Stockholm as well as appointment of Uladzimir Makei as a new Belarus Foreign Minister constitute the main block of the Belarus-related news in the Spanish media. These issues to various extents were covered by newspapers *El País*, *El Mundo*, *La Razón* or *ABC* as well as *RTVE* and *Telecinco* TV channels.

El País devoted a number of articles to the personality of Aliaksandr Lukashenka. It reported that the Organizing Committee has denied Belarusian President the accreditation he had applied to as the President of the National Olympic Committee. Another text "Alexandr Lukashenko, un error geográfico" (*Aliaksandr Lukashenka, a geographical mistake*) is devoted to the personality of the Belarusian leader who has been in power for 18 years thanks to rigged elections and disappearing rivals. Whilst the tyrant thinks of establishing a dynasty, 54% of the population dreams of leaving the country.

New on The_Point Journal website:

David Erkomaishvili: Autumn Aggravation.
The unexpected August continuation of six years old events caused by an extradition of the Azeri soldier Ramil Shafarov from Hungary to Azerbaijan resulted into a genuine cyber war between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Maria Michalk: Unsere Activitaten mussen alle dem Spracherhalt dienen!*(All our activities must contribute to the preservation of language!)*
In her interview Maria Michalk, a Bundestag member of Sorbian ethnicity, speaks on the situation of the smallest Slavic nation which is officially recognized as one of four national minorities of the Federal Republic of Germany.

SPORTS

Fighting Victoria

was just two points away from winning the US Open

In the US Open finals, the Belarusian tennis star Victoria Azarenka * lost to Serena Williams 2:6, 6:2, 5:7.

The dramatic match lasted 2 hours and 18 minutes. After winning the second set, and leading 5:3 in the third, Victoria eventually succumbed to the furious onslaught by her experienced American opponent.

Though Serena Williams became the US Open winner for the fourth time, Azarenka remains World's No. 1 according to Women's Tennis Association.



"Could it have gone my way? Probably, yes. But it didn't. And it really, really hurts," said Azarenka. "Those emotions come out and you feel sad, but it's time to really realize what happened today. It was a close match, but not in my favor.

"Serena produced some amazing tennis today. For me she's the greatest player of all time. She took the game to the next level."

Source: *Naša Niva*, September 10, 2012.

Minsk Arena Named Best in KHL

Editor's note: *Kontinental Hockey League or KHL is essentially a Russian league, with currently 18 teams from Russia, and one each from Belarus, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Latvia, the Czech Republic and Slovakia)*

KHL's players named the Minsk Arena as KHL's most attractive, according to the polls conducted by the Top Five show on the NTV Plus TV Channel.



24% of 100 polled players stated that the Minsk Arena is the most pleasant venue to play. The Ice Palace in St. Petersburg was placed second (15.4%). Arena Riga received 11.5% of votes to rank third.

Among the least attractive places were named the Sport Palace in Novokuznetsk (22.9%), the Ice Palace Vityaz in Chekhov (15.5%), and the Sport Palace in Sokolniki, Moscow (11.9%).

This season Minsk Arena has become the KHL's best attended stadium for the second year in a row, being among the best in average attendance in Europe.

Source: *Naša Niva*, September 1, 2012

12 Olympic medals for Belarus

In the 2012 London Summer Olympic Games Belarusian athletes won 12 medals in the following sports:

GOLD medals:

- Nadzieja Astapčuk — women's shotput
- Maksim Mirny and Viktoryja Azáranka — tennis , mixed doubles
- Siarhiej Martynaŭ — men's shooting, 50 meters, rifle, prone position

Note: On August 13, Nadzieja Astapčuk was stripped of her medal, after she tested positive for a banned steroid.



Maksim Mirny, Viktoryja Azáranka won tennis mixed doubles

SILVER medals:

- Aliaksandra Herasimienia — women's swimming, 50m and 100 m. freestyle
- Aliaksandr, Andrej Bahdanovič — men's rowing, canoe doubles, 1000 meters
- Raman Piatrušenka, Vadzim Machnieŭ — men's rowing, double sculls
- Group Rhythmic Gymnastics

BRONZE medals:.

- Maryna Škirmankova — women's weightlifting, category under 69 kilograms.
- Iryna Kulieša — women's weightlifting
- Viktoryja Azáranka — tennis, women's singles
- Iryna Pamielava, Nadzieja Papok, Voľha Chudzienka, Maryna Paltaran — women's rowing, quadruple sculls
- Liuboŭ Čarkašyna — Artistic Gymnastics

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